

The Thrill Book

Semi-Monthly

AUG. 1, 1915
VOL. 2, No. 1



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THE THRILL BOOK

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Publication issued Semimonthly by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. ORMOND G. SMITH, President; GEORGE C. SMITH, Secretary and Treasurer. Copyright, 1919, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1919, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this Magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, February 12, 1919, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian subscription, \$4.32. Foreign, \$5.04.

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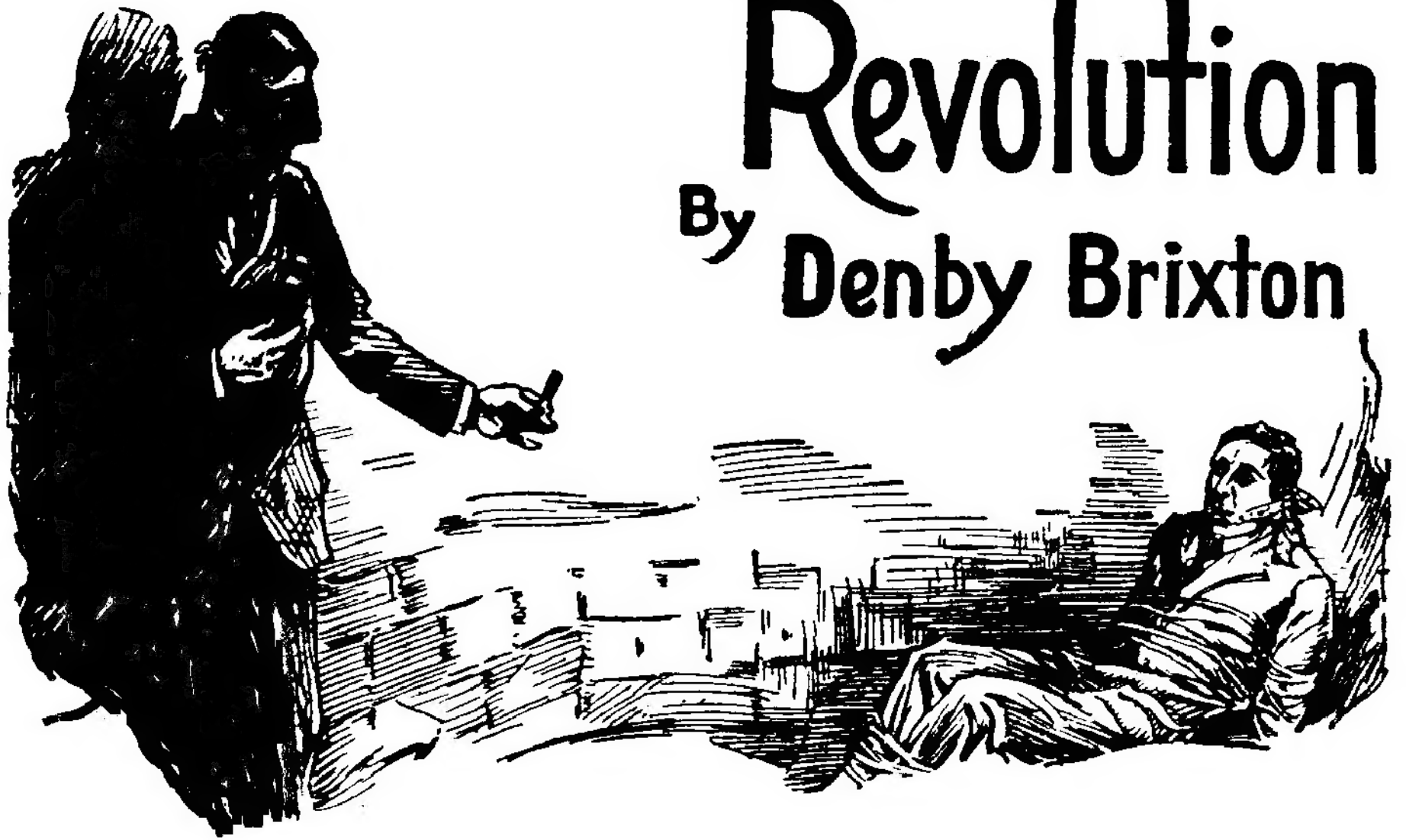
Vol. II

AUGUST 1, 1919

No. 3

The Unknown Revolution

By Denby Brixton



CHAPTER I.

THE COUNCIL OF DEATH.

AS the Mexican secretary of state opened the door to the chamber of the Council of Nine, one of the councilors fell dead to the floor and the other eight men collapsed in their chairs, faces twitching in the last agonies of sudden death!

The señor stood appalled. Barely five minutes ago he had been summoned

by telephone to receive the formal refusal of the council to the ratification of a Lower California land cession by Mexico to the empire of Japan. Inasmuch as the president seldom failed to accept the council's advice or to abide by its action, considerable international significance attached to its decision in this matter. The United States was more than interested in the outcome. Her diplomats in Mexico City eagerly awaited word of the

council's attitude in a matter so strongly affecting the Monroe Doctrine. And the decision had been made. But this wholesale assassination—it could be nothing else—was the result!

A faintness came upon the secretary. The sickening scent of flowers—red roses set in a vase on the table—began to nauseate him. Pallid and trembling before this sudden horror—this mysterious doom visited upon nine of Mexico's ablest and most patriotic councilors—he fled, shrieking like a man suddenly gone mad.

The Administration Palace soon was in a turmoil. The president, when given the dire news, nearly collapsed. The Mexican secret service took possession of the death chamber. All wires and other means of communication were placed under strictest censorship. Not a word leaked outside of Mexico to the world in general concerning the mysterious assassinations. Diplomatic representatives, under seal of secrecy, were informed, and kept their pledge of international silence.

But even they were not advised that the roses in the council chamber had been found, upon analysis, to contain the deadliest secret poison known to the mystic Oriental East. A close inhalation was sufficient to cause death within three minutes. Even at a distance, as witness its effect on the secretary at the door, the poison could do harm. An electric wire connecting with the flowers also was found, apparently having been used to explode a bulb filled with the poison, when the parties interested in the signing of the document were thwarted and found this means of vengeance, even while the council awaited the approach of the secretary. The unsigned cession was found upon the table. The mystery was, how had any one known just what decision the council had made? And how had the miscreant known just when to time the explosion of the pow-

erful fumes which meant death to the inhalers?

The only persons unmoved by the great tragedy were the members of the Japanese embassy. Most concerned, its members were the most phlegmatic. Asked for comment, they merely shrugged, blinked inscrutable eyes, and discussed anything and everything but the subject uppermost in Mexican minds.

Although the censorship was the strictest ever exercised by the Mexican government, the news somehow became widely known throughout Mexico. Sinister threats were made against the president. The peons especially believed he wished to make the land cession and had caused the deaths of his councilors for stubbornly thwarting the grant. Whispers of treachery swept the nation.

Villa, the bandit leader; Lopez, his lieutenant; Zapata, and other outlaws, including adherents of General Blanquet and followers of the dead Huerta, Diaz, and the martyred Madero, seized the opportunity for fomenting open outbreaks against the government in provinces distant from the Mexican capital. Many outrages were reported. Raids into United States territory became more frequent to stir the American government against the Mexican administration. The president's régime became anything but secure. Revolution was in the air. If only the banditti could be united the administration must fall. Some sinister mind apparently was working to bring about this consummation.

It became more than ever necessary to find the perpetrator or perpetrators of the wholesale assassinations. American diplomatic representatives in Mexico City were especially eager to solve the mystery. Every possible clew was traced down without success. American newspaper men in the capital also

worked indefatigably on the problem without result.

And then, to add to the terror, Mexico City soon began to hear weird tales from numerous senators concerning some mysterious presence in the capital, whisperings by invisible voices in their ears, and subtle intrusions into their innermost thoughts.

The whispers invariably were heard by statesmen who chanced to walk alone through the great corridors of the capital. Ministers began to fear to think upon matters affecting their governments, because, out of the intrusions upon their mentalities had developed counter plans to those they were trying to formulate with respect to cementing bonds of friendship with Mexico. Conversations were rare, indeed, upon international affairs. Men spoke of phantom presences near them while walking through the building. Diplomats, cabinet officers, legislative members, and all who were in touch with national and international affairs began to avoid the capital and to hold conferences in secret places.

Nervous persons actually declared they had seen a phantom shape in the capital corridors, but whether the shape were that of a man or a woman they could not say. The climax came when Senator Manuel Taguerrez emphatically declared his arm had been grasped by a phantom hand and that a sibilant whisper had informed him he must retreat from his stand opposing the Japanese land grants or die!

Two nights after his declaration Senator Taguerrez was found dead in his bed, a victim of apoplexy! At least, apoplexy was the cause assigned by the physicians. But in the mind of the American ambassador lurked a suspicion which he soon was to voice to his government that Taguerrez had been slain by a mental power so strong that it could paralyze by suggestive force the physical body of its victim!

Meantime, the revolutionary fever was spreading far and wide. It was evident that a master mind was guiding a systematic series of uprisings with the purpose of cementing a union of the bandit chieftains and to organize a mighty force from the outlaw hordes and the disaffected peons.

In this crisis the American ambassador sent a coded message to Washington urging immediate steps be taken to circumvent the plotter or plotters. He laid especial emphasis upon certain occult phases of the situation in Mexico, heretofore mentioned, and made this point-blank statement:

"Sato Nagati, a Japanese agent here, is behind the whole plot, I am sure. American interests are at stake. I believe Sato is seeking to win the bandit leaders to join forces, overturn the government, set up their own, make a treaty allying Mexico with Japan, and, in return for Japanese friendship and help, cede Sonora and Lower California to Japan. Nagati is dangerous. He is clever. I have nothing tangible to cite against him. He is not a member of the Japanese embassy, and they deny all knowledge of him. But I am certain they are working hand in hand for their empire. Among other things, Nagati has a tremendous psychic knowledge and possesses extraordinary telepathic powers. He also has mastered astral projection to the point where he can send his astral body or any part of it to any place he desires. It would be well for the United States to ward off this dangerous influence by sending several of the ablest secret-service men here. I especially would recommend the sending of Bert Brady, Walter Sprague, and Jack Harding, all of whom are skilled in the psychic, telepathic, and astral fields. Speed is necessary. The revolutionary element grows stronger. Japan nears a foothold. America is in danger. Hurry! We must win."

CHAPTER II.

DEEP WATERS.

ACTING upon the American ambassador's advice, the United States secret service dispatched to Mexico the three men recommended for the dangerous task, Brady, Sprague, and Harding. Sprague ostensibly was an attaché of the American embassy, Brady the Mexico City representative of the International Press Bureau, and Harding an American corporation representative seeking to protect oil interests from sequestration. Each worked separately, making weekly comparisons of the fruits of their vigils. By a secret understanding with the Mexican president they were given entry everywhere and access to any state documents they might deem necessary to scan.

These three experts possessed minds highly sensitive and flexible to their wills. They quite easily could read the thoughts in minds untrained to combat their influence. Even distance and walls were no barriers to their penetrating intellects. But try as they would, individually or collectively, their powers were no match for the wonderfully developed powers possessed by Sato Nagati.

"I've tried my best to read Sato's mind," said Sprague as the trio one night discussed the mysterious Jap. "But he's always on guard—feels my mental probing of his mind, and offsets my influence by thinking of inconsequential matters whenever I try to intrude on his thoughts."

"Same here," commented Brady.

"And here," added Harding.

"We'll have to excel him—he's still master—if we wish to come out of this alive," said Sprague. "Let's practice more."

Accordingly, the three men began a series of weird experiments. One was especially intended to obtain the power the Jap could exert to paralyze or slay

a person by sheer mental concentration. For this purpose they used dogs as subjects. At the end of a week their already highly trained minds were so developed that, sitting in a room, concentrating mentally upon a dog in the yard below, each man could cause the individual dog's death almost instantaneously!

Then they experimented upon one another, not for the purpose of slaying or paralyzing, but for strengthening counteracting influences or forces to ward off danger of paralysis or death through the mental concentration of another person—Sato Nagati, for instance, or any one else able to seal another's doom by mental suggestion.

To explain the theory they proceeded on, let it be understood that the main basis of their experimentation was along telepathic lines, but telepathy so highly developed that it went beyond what normally is known of telepathy. For instance: One mind happens to strike a thought current sympathetic with that of another mind and an impression is created, registered on the mentality of each. So, for instance, I might think of you, you might think of me, and we might tell each other of it later, marveling at what we would describe as a coincidence. But it is not a coincidence. It is merely a telepathic juncture, nothing else. Now, it is obvious that if this telepathic juncture can take place without any mental concentration whatever, then it also can be caused to take place by concentrating the mental faculties. Another mind, similarly concentrating with yours, ultimately can establish an actual method of communicating thought from brain to brain. Again, it is manifestly more difficult to impress a mind which is not thus attuned to meet yours. This power perfected enables one to establish communication, not alone with minds impressionable, but with other minds not apparently open to impres-

sion. Also, a perfectly trained telepathist can communicate with many minds at once.

Sprague, for instance, as also his two companions, could apparently whisper in a person's ear whatever he wished to say, and the person would believe he heard a voice, where really it was but a mental suggestion. Again, he could make a person believe he felt the touch of his hand, where that person's mind had merely received an impression that a hand was touching him. The mind, in other words, registers an aural impression to convey the idea of a spoken word or of a touch. The thought makes the mind revert to the cheek, for instance, if the telepathist wishes to convey the impression of a hand smoothing the cheek of another. In other words, it is a compelling of the receiving mind to believe a hand smooths the cheek. Again, in grasping an arm, the thought registered is a command to the receiving mind that a hand is grasping an arm, although no hand actually touches the arm. Similarly, the telepathic powers of the trio were so developed now that they could force a mind to die!

Not until their minds worked in perfect sympathy did they desist their telepathic experiments. Then they experimented to perfect themselves in astral projection. At the end of the third week the three men, already well grounded in this wonderful science, had developed their well-controlled spiritual entities to such an extent that they could send their astral bodies several feet. This achieved, they experimented until they could project their astral bodies nearly a mile, retaining consciousness in the interval. Despite their gruesomeness, these experiments were not without some amusing features.

For instance, Harding and Sprague would project their astral bodies to the center of a room and cause them to dance together, bow and scrape and do

all manner of absurd things. This was to achieve flexibility and quick response to their wills. Brady then would project his astral form, and the three spirit bodies would play "ring around a rose" just like children in games, while the three men would watch and study their spiritual entities.

Nor is such a marvel new. Even in the ancient Egyptian days the priesthood held the secret and bequeathed the mystery to our generation in their mystic stories of Ra—the inner entity animating the flesh. But science did not rediscover the motivating principle of projecting the Ra—what we moderns call the astral body—until quite recently.

The three men found inestimable help in the excellent treatise by Professor Wilfred A. Pattison, of the American Society of Psychic Research, himself a self-schooled student of astral possibilities; another written by Professor Cornelius M. Devinney, whose researches in this particular field have established for him an international reputation, especially for his theory, asserted in all reverence, that the reappearance of Jesus after death was the reappearance, not of His physical person, but of His astral body, and that, therefore, He forbade his followers to touch Him. These volumes they caused to be sent from the National Library, an institution maintained by the American Society of Psychic Research.

During their entire period of experimentation, which ended some two months after their arrival in Mexico, they gave no attention whatever to Sato Nagati, despite the urgent solicitation of the American ambassador, who was becoming more and more alarmed at the progress of the revolutionists. They told him it would be suicide to work on the case before they were convinced of mastery over Sato, and he, perforce, had to be content.

And then, just when the ambassador

was informed by them that they were ready to begin operations against Sato and the revolutionists—Harding and Brady disappeared!

CHAPTER III.

THE ENIGMA DEEPENS.

SPRAGUE alone met the ambassador when the latter called at the Grand Hotel.

"Where are Brady and Harding?" asked the statesman.

"Gone," was Sprague's laconic reply, although he seemed worried.

"Where?"

"I shall find them."

"But where are they?"

"Even if I knew—secret-service men never talk much, you know; they act."

The ambassador bowed.

"True," he said.

"I'm left alone now to fight——"

"Sato?"

"Yes."

"Have you met him yet?"

"No; I shall—to-day. But I saw him yesterday," concluded Sprague enigmatically.

"Saw him yesterday? Why, he hasn't been in Mexico City for three weeks!"

"But I saw him," insisted Sprague. The ambassador smiled.

"Ah, I see," he said. "Astral projection, eh? And you know that he's——"

"On his way here," interrupted Sprague. "I saw him yesterday—on the road. Never met him personally, but I know him. There could be no mistake."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the ambassador. "Are we in to-day's events or back in medieval times?"

"There are more marvels to-day than ever were dreamed of in the ancient days, when superstition ran riot," said Sprague.

"Well, I'd rather fight a regiment of honestly human soldiers than one of

these inhuman, uncanny creations of astral bodies or telepathic mentalities! Whew!"

The ambassador brushed his hand across his brow, damp with perspiration. Sprague didn't blame him a bit. It was enough to frighten any brave man.

"Sato knows we're in Mexico," said Sprague, "but we've fought off his mind, so he believes we're harmless to his purposes. You must leave me now, sir, because I have much to do."

The ambassador rose. He was wondering about the other two men, but even more he wondered at the courage of this man Sprague, who, alone now, was left to combat the wily Jap.

"Sprague," he said warmly, holding out his hand, "be careful or you'll disappear, too."

Sprague smiled. "If I do, sir, don't worry," he said, "because——"

"Because what?"

"Life's too short to worry."

"Noncommittal, as usual," smiled the statesman.

"Sato might read your mind," said Sprague warningly, "so it won't do to let you know too much until we've got Sato caged."

And then both men blanched as a mocking laugh sounded in their ears.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the ambassador. "That was Sato's laugh! I'd know it in a thousand."

Sprague had recovered his poise.

"He knows I'm on his trail—now," he said soberly. "And may the best man win!"

The ambassador, trembling, went to the door and opened it. And as he did he reeled backward, almost fainting, as a yellow face, with eyes once seen never forgotten, faded slowly before his eyes like mist before the sun.

Sprague sprang to support him. "I saw it, too," he said soberly. "It was Sato's astral head!"

CHAPTER IV.

SATO NAGATI.

WHEN the ambassador arrived at his residence, to which he had gone immediately after the harrowing experience in Sprague's room, he was startled by finding Sato Nagati in his drawing-room, waiting for him. The Jap rose and bowed profoundly when the ambassador entered.

"Your servant admitted me," he explained. "I knew you were usually in about this hour." In the Jap's English was no flaw of foreign accent.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Nagati," said the ambassador, affecting a cordiality which did not deceive the Jap, but which he appeared to accept as genuine. "Sit down. What can I do for you?"

"I came to ask your advice about investing some money in an American mining stock," said the Oriental.

"Name?"

"Texas Spelter, Limited."

"You'd lose your money in that stock," sniffed the ambassador. "It's on the verge of bankruptcy right now."

"Thanks," said the Jap. "I nearly made the investment. Now I won't."

The ambassador could not forego studying the face of the man before him. It was strong and intellectual. Deep-set, penetrating black eyes, like somber pools shining in moonlight, mystic eyes, seemed to cast a spell upon him. Teeth set in perfect evenness, almost dazzling in their contrast to the Jap's yellow skin, were disclosed whenever he smiled, which was rarely. He always seemed thoughtful, yet ever aware of what transpired about him. His hands were delicate, but strong.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Nagati?" asked the ambassador.

"No, thanks. Merely called about the stock," said the Jap, rising.

He paused at the door.

"A man named Brady was found dead just outside the city," he said casually. "I saw him as I came into town. Poor fellow! The doctor said it was apoplexy."

And as the ambassador started, the Jap lithely swung down the steps leading to the street, his face like a gargoyle image.

By telephone the ambassador informed Sprague of Brady's death.

"Murdered—just like Senator Taguerrez!" he told Sprague. "I always suspected the senator was killed."

"He was," came the mournful voice of Sprague. "And Brady, too, I guess."

But Sprague was smiling—smiling across the room at Bert Brady, pale but alive, sitting in a chair and smiling back at him!

When Sprague rang off he turned to Brady.

"Nearly got me!" exclaimed the latter. "Only for our practice I'd have been dead now. That yellow fiend's a master at our game! But I know he believes I'm dead because I had the wit to deaden my mind; you know how we practiced that stunt."

Sprague nodded. "You certainly were lucky to have your wits about you," he commented. "Sato sent his astral head here just a short while ago. Lay low, Brady. How about Harding?"

"He's—you know where."

"Fine!" exclaimed Sprague. "Now, Brady, make yourself scarce and get out of Mexico City. You know the plan. Did you find anything in Baron Shi Yat's place?"

"Nothing."

"Well, they figure you're dead. I'll bury you decently, old man—stones in a coffin, you know. Now, off on your other trail."

Brady, instead of going to the door, went to the window. Waving his hand, he stepped across the sill. The window

was some twelve feet from the ground. Sprague saw Brady's hands gripping the sill as he lowered himself; then the hands slipped off and Brady was gone on his mysterious mission.

CHAPTER V.

SEÑORITA DOLORES PEREZ.

LOVE casts nets about the hearts of men at most unexpected and, many times, inopportune moments. And so Sprague became entangled that night at a reception given by the American ambassador. Among the guests was Señorita Dolores Perez, niece of the Mexican secretary of state. More Spanish than Mexican, with the pride of Arragonese blood pulsing in every vein, she cast disdainful eyes upon the Mexican gallants who sought her smiles. But the moment Sprague and she met, that moment both were lost in the meshes of love's weaving and could not extricate themselves, even if they would, which they would not.

Though their lips said never a word, their hearts spoke—and their eyes—that language which lovers the world over understand.

Sprague's pressure on her hand as they left the reception and she fared homeward with her father was anything but that of a casual acquaintance. Nor was her clasp any less responsive to her heart's dictates. And Sprague walked on air strolling to his hotel, dreaming of her wondrous black eyes, her piquant little nose, her coral ears and ruby lips—just like any other lover might do and thousands, millions, have done before him. So much did he dwell upon her that he almost was caught off his guard, until he felt the subtle, intrusive working of Sato Nagati's mind trying to ferret from his mind the plans he and his secret-service aid—Sato really believed Brady dead—were trying to consummate against the Jap and the Mexican revolutionaries.

Instantly Sprague put up the barriers of his own mentality against this intrusion, thankful indeed that the Jap had obtained merely the knowledge that he loved Señorita Dolores Perez and that his mind had not dwelled in the slightest upon the tasks ahead.

But his thankfulness was to change to raging fury, when, on the morrow, the city was electrified by the disappearance of Señorita Dolores.

She had gone to her bed, disrobed, and had fallen asleep, according to the story told by her Mexican maid and duenna. The impress of her body on the bedding still remained, but Dolores was gone—without the slightest trace, with never a scream, and seemingly as though she had been spirited away by supernatural means, although such a theory was ridiculed by the Mexican secret-service men called in.

In his heart Sprague knew this kidnaping was aimed as a blow at himself. But more than ever he became determined to end this terrifying activity on the part of Sato Nagati, and he sent his powerful telepathic mind in search of the Jap. But his efforts were fruitless. Sato was gone—gone from Mexico City at least—and must be sought elsewhere. This much Sprague knew without even stirring from his office. For had Sato been within reach of the subtle telepathic reachings of Sprague's mind, not even his powerful counteraction could prevent Sprague's learning of his presence in the city.

That day, as mysteriously as had Brady and Harding, Sprague disappeared, heart hungry for Dolores and with vengeance glowing in his breast.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BANDIT'S LAIR.

SATO NAGATI glanced sidewise at Dolores, strapped in the seat beside him. His airplane was soaring toward the distant peak of Monte Cristobal, a

gleaming crest of snow flashing against the rich sapphire of the Sonora skies. A smile of sarcastic triumph wreathed his thin lips.

"So," he communed with himself, "this Sprague loves you, eh? Well, he shall have a long hunt! And these dogs of Mexicans—mongrels I must associate with for my emperor's sake—they'll never know! Sprague out of the way, I may let you return, you white beauty. But not before."

Dolores was inert, deep in the lethargy of hypnotic sleep into which Sato had cast her before kidnaping her from her father's home. Her face still retained the smile of adolescent joy with which she had retired, thinking of her American.

Rapidly the airplane neared the mighty chain of hills over which Monte Cristobal lifted its noble summit. Then, with a swift turn to the right, Sato guided his machine in a long, slanting downward course, landing gently in a clearing just outside a low, squat building, much resembling, but far larger than, the usual one-story adobe huts of native Mexican peons.

Carefully unstrapping Dolores, who gave never a sign of consciousness, the Jap lifted her from the seat and walked across the clearing toward the hut. His muscles of steel felt no slightest exertion in carrying the burden, and he did not breathe one whit the heavier when he arrived before the door. It was opened by another Japanese, who bowed low before Sato as before a lord of the Samurai.

"The chamber is prepared?" asked Sato in his native tongue.

"Yes, lord," answered the other.

"It is well."

Sato unceremoniously brushed past his assistant and into the main compartment of the hut. Heavy silken portières were draped against the walls, hiding their ugliness. Several taborets and teakwood chairs lent an air of

comfort to the room. An idol—of Buddha—stood in a corner, and incense was burning before it.

Sato bowed to the image, once, twice, thrice, then placed Dolores' body on a low divan, disclosed when he removed an ornate Japanese screen from its place in front of it. He pressed a button in the wall. Slowly the divan, with Dolores upon it, sank below the flooring. A few moments later he pressed a second button. The section which had borne her down rose into place and the flooring appeared as it had before. Over the almost imperceptible cracks Sato cast a rug.

Then, with a face inscrutable as that of the carved Buddha, he bowed thrice again to the figure and stalked from the hut, his follower, bowing behind him, closing the door, but watching until Sato, in his airplane, was a mere dot against the sky.

Half an hour later Sato stepped from his machine in a narrow ravine between Monte Cristobal and Monte Lorez. Facing him stood a Mexican, rifle leveled at his heart.

"The password!" demanded the Mexican.

"*Buenos amigo*," replied Sato calmly. Then, speaking in Mexican, as the bandit lowered his weapon: "Is Villa here?"

"Yes; he waits for you."

"Good!" exclaimed Sato, tossing the Mexican a silver piece. "I have much to do. The hour approaches. I shall praise your vigilance to your chief."

The Mexican bowed as the Jap entered the defile and picked his way through the rocky pass. He passed several banditti, who glanced at him with deepest respect and awe, for Sato's fame had spread through the outlaw camps and he was feared for his evident supernatural gifts.

Relying entirely upon his mental power to guide him, Sato found the hut in which Villa awaited him and an-

nounced himself to the guard at the door. Villa himself hastened to the threshold upon hearing Sato's voice and bade him enter. The two men soon were in deep conversation.

"One of the three Americans I fear is dead," Sato told the famous Mexican prototype of "Fra Diavolo." Villa's mustachioed lips curled.

"One American the less," he muttered. "What of the other two men?"

"One is in my power," smirked Sato. "The other is the weakest of the three. I can overcome him. Sprague is the one I fear most. He is resourceful and always wide awake."

"Which one is dead?" asked Villa. "Brady."

"And Sprague—whom you fear—is in your power?"

"Yes."

"A captive?"

"No," said Sato. "But I have the means of bringing him to his knees."

"A woman, eh?" surmised the bandit shrewdly.

"Yes; but enough of this question and answer. I must hurry to the other factions—Zapata first."

Villa frowned. Zapata ever had been a thorn in his side. Sato hastened to reassure the bandit. "Zapata will join with you," he told the outlaw. "So will the Madero, Diaz, Blanquet, and Huerta men. Ten days from now we strike—for Mexico and Japan!"

"You ask much—for Japan," snarled Villa.

"A trifle—Sonora and Lower California," said Sato lightly. "In return for——"

"Yes," interposed Villa. "In return—Japan for a time will be friendly, and then—pouf! Mexico is hers!"

"Nonsense! You will be the ruler of all Mexico. Think of that! Your rivals—well, you needn't have any rivals—if you help me." The Jap's voice and manner were unctuous. His flattery smoothed Villa's ruffled spirits.

The vista of being all-powerful in Mexico and posing as its deliverer, even while fattening on its sufferings, was enough to cast into the background all the suspicions Villa entertained. Sato read the bandit's mind as he might a printed page.

"You will have all ready, general, for the great attack on Mexico City ten days hence?" he asked.

"I shall be ready," answered Villa.

"It is well. Japan never forgets a friend."

"Or an enemy!" exclaimed the bandit.

But Sato chose to ignore this parting shot as he stepped to the door. "Good-by, amigo, next—Emperor of Mexico!" he exclaimed, bowing low to Villa, the while his heart cursed the outlaw chief as a Mexican dog.

Villa was standing in a dream of future glory as Sato passed out into the sunset glow, which now cast a golden glory upon the wild retreat of the most redoubtable and ablest of the Mexican banditti leaders. Nagati hurried to the narrow defile through which he had entered. He expected a guard to intercept him and demand the password. But no guard appeared. Vaguely uneasy, Sato peered around. In a little thicket he noticed the glint of a red sash, such as many of the Villa men wore. He hurried to the thicket.

Face down, erstwhile bronze skin a sick, deathly, yellowish white, the guard he had encountered lay—dead!

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW RIDDLE.

WITH a curse of fury Sato spurned the dead Mexican with his foot. "Vile dog!" he growled. "Is it thus you kept watch?" He stooped and turned the Mexican face upward. Then, with a start of sudden fear, Sato peered more closely at the bandit's features.

He was not the same guard who had demanded the password of Sato! And even more startling to the Jap, the man apparently had died of apoplexy! There was no mistaking the cause of death.

With growing terror the Jap raced through the defile, eager to reach his airplane to see if it were safe. Panting, not so much from exertion as a combination of effort and nervous anxiety, Sato finally arrived at the clearing where he had left his aëro.

His sky steed was gone!

The Jap turned a livid white, so strongly overwrought was he. His eyes had the look of a hunted hare. His frame trembled with fury and terror combined. His lips were like two purple lines drawn back to bare teeth tightly clenched.

For fully five minutes he stood thus, as though benumbed with the emotions consuming him. Then his color returned, his eyes became calmer, but not less malignant, and he studied the ground around the place where his airplane had rested. Footprints were there—large footprints—larger than the average Mexican's.

"Not Sprague; he couldn't be here. I left him in Mexico City," reasoned the Jap. "Brady is dead; it couldn't be Brady. Harding? Yes, it must have been Harding. But how did he get here? And have these men learned the great secret—how to kill with the mind alone? Great Buddha! Now am I facing danger indeed! The plane—they could have that—if only I could get back what is in the plane! How can I return to my emperor without that for which I have chanced death a hundred times? I must recover the plane! I must—or"—he shuddered—"Buddha have mercy, for the mikado will not!"

Shuddering with dread, the Jap retraced his steps, walking quickly. He went unaccosted through the defile

where the dead bandit kept the vigil of eternity. "A poor guard they keep," he sneered, "with one man only to watch. I must warn Villa to detail more men. Then—my airplane and its secrets!"

Sato quickened his pace and came to Villa's headquarters. He brushed past the guard and entered.

"Your guard—at the defile—is dead!" he cried. "He is not the one I saw when I entered."

Villa started. "What?" he shouted. "Dead? Not the same?"

"No," snarled the Jap, "not the same. You should not trust to one man alone, general. Our enemies are strong; they have stolen my airplane, too."

The bandit chieftain rushed to the door, followed closely by Sato. Bellowing a loud command, which quickly brought several of the banditti before him, Villa picked out one of the men.

"You were in charge of the guard?" he asked.

"Si, general," replied the other. "I put my best man at the entrance."

"Who was he?"

"The Americano you swore in—the renegade who fled from his country's army draft and hated the United States. Shall I call him?"

"Did I tell you to watch him?"

"Si, general. He always was vigilant, and he took the oath that means death to him who fails. He adopted our dress. He speaks Mexican. So I put him on guard. Shall I change the guard?"

"He's a traitor!" hissed Villa. "And you—you dog—you put him where he might have ruined us all. He has killed one of our men who probably saw him stealing away, and he has stolen Sato's airplane. If you had watched longer, as you should, he would have been found to be the traitor he is. But you didn't, and"—his hand suddenly darted forward, gripping the throat of the man

he was addressing—"this spells your doom!"

Under those strong fingers the Mexican's face turned purple, his tongue lolled from his mouth, his eyes bulged horribly. He made a movement toward his hip for a gun. But Villa gripped his hand with his free fist and beckoned to Sato. The Jap nodded understandingly, drew a knife from Villa's belt, and passed its keen edge through the ribs of the struggling bandit—into his heart. A quiver and the limp form sagged downward as Villa, with an oath, cast it from him to the ground.

The other members gazed, spell-bound. Villa turned to them. "When I give orders obey—or die—like this swine!" he snarled. "Pedro," turning to one of the banditti, "you will take this dog's place as chief of the guards. See to it you do not fail as he did, or you will join him in hell!"

Sato, who had wiped the bloody blade of Villa's dagger on the grass, gave the weapon to the bandit chief, who thrust it back into his belt.

"I must have a horse," said Sato. "Time presses, and I must move to recover my plane."

At Villa's command one bandit hurried to a corral where the horses were kept and returned with a superb steed fully saddled and bridled. Sato, with a word of thanks, bestrode it and rode off, hell in his heart belying his apparent calm exterior. The trip he had made in a few hours from Mexico City by airplane would require many hours on horseback. Could he gain anything by going to the capital? Only the obtaining of another plane. That he must get—and get it to-morrow, if the plan for a consolidated attack on Mexico City ten days hence were to be successfully accomplished. But to-day—what could he do to-day?

And then, with sudden panic, he be-thought himself of Dolores Perez, his prisoner in the adobe hut. Had the

man who took his plane also known about her? And if he did, had he been able to rescue the secretary's daughter?

Sato spurred his horse with his shoe heel, as the steed turned into a fairly good path through the wild terrain. Suddenly he checked the animal's course, cursing. "Why didn't I think of it before—in time?" he muttered savagely. "Why?"

His body sat tense in the saddle, every nerve taut with the strain Sato suddenly put upon his astral powers. He was projecting his astral body to the cabin where Dolores had been left a prisoner. What he saw there can be imagined by what his physical lips said as a look of fury betrayed the story in his heart: "Tono Yati—dead!" he muttered, lips livid. "And Dolores—gone!" Sato suddenly seemed aged and broken. "Shall I fail?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESCUE.

SATO'S mesmeric influence gradually weakened, and Dolores wonderingly awakened in a luxuriously appointed apartment lighted by electric bulbs—an apartment she never before had seen. Where was she? She had retired to her room and had fallen asleep in her own bed. And now—to awaken thus—what did it mean?

Slowly she arose and glanced around, eyes growing more wild and startled as they took in the unmistakably Japanese decorations in this strange boudoir. In a panic she rushed toward the wall, seeking a door. But she found no door. The walls were solid—earth covered with concrete, as she discovered by moving aside the silken portières covering them.

Kidnaped! The thought struck terror to her heart. Then came the question: Why had she been kidnaped? Dolores could think of no reason for it—unless it were her beauty. The

thought made her tremble. She remembered now how several of the Japanese embassy members openly had expressed their admiration for her charms, Sato Nagati, who was not a member of the embassy, especially having made himself obnoxious by his unveneered advances. He had not been even polite, she thought. Could it be that he was her abductor? She recalled the many tales she had heard concerning him and his occult powers, his remorseless vengeance upon those who stood in his way.

Where was she? How had she come here? Had he wrought one of his occult spells upon her soul? It must have been so. Dolores glanced upward. A wooden ceiling, quite high, met her eyes. Heavy, crudely adzed timbers supported the planking, which was of better carpentry. But there was no outlet evident. The air was close and foul. Suddenly Dolores screamed in a frenzy of nervous dread. She had not intended to give way to her fears, but she was a woman, and this situation was more than she could bear.

She heard a sound as of a garment swishing overhead. Tono Yati was pulling away the heavy rug over the trapdoor, but Dolores did not know this. Then a rasping sound smote her hearing, again from above, and, to her amazement, part of the ceiling descended a few inches and remained stationary. She saw two iron rods extending upward and apparently running farther into the upper wall, forming the trapdoor's support. Then a yellow face leered down at her—Tono Yati's.

"You called?" came his voice, sneering, in Mexican.

"Let me out!" shrieked Dolores. "You fiend!"

"The lady is comfortable, but hungry perhaps," said the Jap. "I shall send down refreshments." His face disappeared. Dolores heard the patter of

his sandaled feet as he moved about. A few moments later he called down: "Here are rice and tea, lady. Take them from the string." Tono's yellow hands appeared, holding a tray suspended from a cord and held horizontally by four strands, one from each corner, ending in an apex where the cord for lowering it was attached. As the tray descended Dolores saw a pot of tea and a saucer of rice. She was hungry. But should she eat? Suppose the rice and tea were poisoned? A moment's reflection, however, banished this fear. The Japs had her in their power; they could slay her if that was their design. Dolores was certain her death was not contemplated. So she took the rice and tea. A spoon lay in the saucer of food.

"When you have eaten put the dishes on the tray," directed Tono Yati from above.

Dolores sat on the divan upon which Sato had placed her when he had brought her, unconscious, to this place. The divan was equipped with large rollers and had glided off the trapdoor of its own momentum, the door, when reaching the cellar floor, automatically swinging to a slant by some mechanism controlled by the operator above. This explains the method by which the divan was run off the inclined trapdoor in safety to the floor of Dolores' prison.

The girl ate the rice and drank the tea. She felt refreshed and stronger, better able to face whatever fate might hold in store for her.

Tono Yati called down once to ask if she had eaten the food, but the girl, more to enjoy the fresher air admitted by the open trapdoor than to spar for time, told him she would inform him when to pull up the cord with the tray. And thus unconsciously she assisted in weaving the web of destiny.

Upstairs, Tono Yati heard the croon of a far-off airplane, traveling toward the adobe hut. He went to the door

and peered upward. The lines of the craft were unmistakably those of Sato Nagati's, and Tono Yati wished to be found diligently watchful when his master alighted from the clouds.

More than an hour had passed since Sato had left the maiden in Tono's keeping, and his return was not unreasonable to expect. So Tono Yati put on his blindest smiles, ready to greet his lord with the intelligence that the girl below was awake and not so sulky or obstinate as to refuse food. He knew she could not possibly escape from the cellar alone, even though she were to stand the divan on end. No other article of furniture could be superimposed so as to give her hands a chance to grip the edges of the flooring where the trap opened. And even if she did get out, she must flee through the door at which he was standing—and she was no match for him. So Tono Yati gave all his thoughts to his master's reception.

Soon the machine alighted, but closer to the hut than Sato usually stopped it. This little difference did not escape Tono Yati, but he saw nothing amiss in the incident. As his lord stepped from the fuselage, Tono Yati began to bow and bow, until finally a heavy hand was placed on his shoulder and a voice—not that of Sato—commanded in English: "Let up! Where's the girl?"

Tono Yati turned a sickly color. Then, with a quick turn of his wiry body, he essayed to jiu-jitsu the newcomer. But he found himself in a grip of steel. He fought his right arm loose and sought to draw his knife. Then things went black for Tono Yati as the American—attired like a bandit and with skin stained to resemble a Mexican's—glared into Tono's eyes. The Jap's form wilted, his grip relaxed, and he fell prone—dead—before the man who had stolen Sato's airplane.

"Sorry I had to do it," muttered the

man, "but delay now might spill the beans."

He rushed into the hut, saw the trapdoor's opening, and hurried to it. Peering through the crevice, he saw Dolores looking upward as though his heavy tread had startled her as contrasted with the patter of Tono Yati's sandals.

"Señorita Perez," called the American in Mexican, "are you safe?"

"Who are you?" she asked, startled.

"A friend—never mind who. I've come to take you away to safety. Do you know how to operate this lift?"

"No," she answered.

The man sought—and found—the button in the wall which Sato had pressed. He likewise pressed it, and the trapdoor slowly lowered into the cellar. "Step on it, señorita," he said. Dolores did so. The stranger then pressed another button in juxtaposition to the first, and the lift slowly rose, bearing its precious burden upward to light and air and freedom.

"H'm-m! Some class! Storage battery operates this, I'll bet," muttered the American. He led Dolores out through the door. The dead Jap, slain by mental concentration similar to that which had ended the life of the Villa bandit discovered by Sato at the defile and who had sought to stay the American when he essayed to go to Sato's airplane, evoked a shudder from Dolores. The stranger hurried her past the corpse toward the airplane in which, all unwitting, she had been carried to this place a prisoner and in which she now was to flee to safety from the machinations of the master mind of Sato Nagati.

In a trice she was strapped into a seat, the stranger took his place at the wheel, and in a moment more they were soaring up—up—up—until Dolores' head seemed to spin. And ever that roar—roar—roar of the powerful motor deafened her to all other sound. Straight toward the northeast the stran-

ger headed his aerial craft, urging it to highest speed. And as he flew he took advantage of every scrap of cloud behind which to hide, as though fully aware of the struggle he might be compelled to face should Sato discover him in flight ere he had outdistanced the possibility of Sato's astral body being projected up into the fuselage and unnerve him to fall or seek to cause his death directly by occult suggestion.

Whether or not this could have been done the American could surmise only, as Sato had not the slightest thought his machine was being stolen or that the rescue of Dolores had been accomplished. Sato had lingered too long with Villa; he had ridden when he should have projected his astral form in search of his plane—and thus had failed.

But the airman taking Dolores to safety was unwilling to chance failure by delay or lack of precaution. Consequently, due to the terrific pace at which he flew and the high altitude he had sought, Dolores fainted dead away and did not know anything more until she felt herself being unstrapped from her seat in the plane.

"Where am I?" she gasped, even as she opened her eyes.

"Nogales, Arizona, United States," answered her erstwhile sky pilot, glancing up from his task of unbuckling the last strap which held her.

"Nogales?" she cried. "Why, that's a long distance from—— It can't be possible!"

"But it is true," he said, assisting her to step from the machine. "You are to remain here until everything is safe in Mexico. If that fiend ever gets you in his clutches again I wouldn't give much for your chances."

"But my uncle——"

"He is being told where you are—right now," said the American. "My partner is telegraphing. But your parents——"

"Are dead," said Dolores softly. "Uncle is my all."

"Put this blanket around you, señorita," said the American, stooping and lifting out of the fuselage a thick woolen one. "I had it around you loosely while we were high up, or you'd have frozen in the cold air. I had to remove it when I unstrapped you." He kept his face averted as he handed her the blanket.

Dolores was crimson with embarrassment. Until now she had given not the slightest thought to her raiment, which consisted solely of her silken *robe de nuit*. She hurriedly draped the blanket about her form, grateful to the American for his tact.

"Where now?" she asked.

He turned to her. "The American general here will care for you, señorita. Your presence must be kept secret. He understands. My partner saw me coming and is making all arrangements. We're just on the outskirts. I don't want the Mexicans hereabouts to see you, so please bundle that blanket so your eyes only can be seen. Then we'll walk into town."

"Who is your partner? How did you let him know?" asked Dolores, amazed by his matter-of-factness.

"My partner?" he asked quizzically. "He's Walter Sprague——"

"Here?" gasped Dolores in even deeper amazement, but with sudden happiness surging upon her.

"Yes," answered the American, "he came here by train. I let him know while I was flying here. He was only three miles away—just across the border. I knew where to reach him. It was simple."

"You—let—him—know?" came Dolores' voice in wonder. "How?"

"Merely a matter of telepathy," he said lightly. "Come—let us go. You must be hungry."

They were in a field not far from a road. Dolores' feet were bare and the

stubble anything but soft. So the American lifted her in his arms. Thus they came to the road just as a horseman dashed up. Dolores glanced at the equestrian. Then a glad cry burst from her lips:

"Señor Sprague!"

He sprang from his steed. "Thank God!" he cried, and took her in his arms, the airman relinquishing his sweet burden to the lover and turning away. A few moments of soft converse with Dolores over, Sprague placed her on his horse and turned to the man who had rescued her.

"Good work, Brady!" he said heartily.

Brady flushed. "I suppose congratulations are in order," he commented significantly, glancing toward Dolores.

"They are," said Sprague happily. "Señorita Dolores has honored me by accepting my proposal."

Brady gripped Sprague's hand with eloquence deeper than words. Then he said: "Sato thinks Harding took his machine, I guess."

"Naturally," commented Sprague. "Sato thinks you're dead, and he knew I couldn't reach Monte Cristobal as soon as he could in his airplane. But what did you learn?"

"Sato has nearly brought the bandits to a complete union of forces. Ten days from now they are to advance in a body from all sides on Mexico City."

"Great heavens!" cried Sprague. "We'll have to hustle. Wait here for me. I'll take Dolores to the general's home and return in a jiffy."

He sprang into the saddle behind Dolores. "Hold fast," he said to her, then urged the horse into a long, swinging stride toward Nogales, Brady watching until horse and riders disappeared around a bend in the road.

Half an hour later Sprague returned on foot. "We must hurry to Mexico City and warn the president," he said.

"Have you enough gasoline for the trip?"

Brady, who had reassured himself on this score, nodded. The two men strode off the road into the field and so to the airplane. Dusk was falling, and most of their trip would be in the darkness. Entering the fuselage and strapping themselves into their seats, they began their long flight toward the Mexican capital, little realizing the sinister dangers soon to encompass them in their efforts to circumvent the designs of Sato Nagati.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOUL OF MADERO.

IN Mexico rumor travels faster than in any other nation, especially if the supernatural is involved. A Zapatist named Barto Buena in Guadranoz, a tiny town sixty miles south of Mexico City, told some of his fellows that he had been accosted by a spirit which had gripped his arm and whispered in his ear.

"What did the spirit say?" asked one superstitious listener.

"It said, 'I am the spirit of Francisco Madero. Beware of the Japanese! Keep Mexico for Mexicans!' Then it faded away."

Eighty miles south of the capital lies Irrientos, a village of some four hundred residents—men, women, children, and dogs. Here, likewise, a Zapatist asserted a ghost had placed a phantom hand on his shoulder and murmured: "Beware giving Mexican land to the Japanese. I am Madero's spirit, warning Mexico's friends again, as I did in life, against her enemies."

Similar stories bobbed up at points more or less distant, as other peons were visited, touched and addressed by the shade of Madero, than whom no Mexican ever was more beloved by the downtrodden lower classes of the misguided republic. Diaz men encountered

the phantom and received the same warning. And to add to its solemnity, another ghostly visitant would proclaim itself the shade of Diaz and tell its listener to beware the plans contemplated by the leaders to make an alliance with Japan. The same experiences were retold by men in the Villa ranks, the Blanquet forces, and even in the administration armies.

Murmurs of dissatisfaction began to spread over the land as these warnings gained headway, losing nothing of their force in the retelling, but, like all rumors, gathering more and more fanciful additions as the imaginations of the story-tellers conjured up new details. The Japanese began to be looked upon with distrust and aversion. The bandit leaders themselves, hearing the tales and being very superstitious, found their willingness to play into the Orientals' hands dwindle daily. The climax came when Madero's shade paid a visit to the tent of the Indian leader, Zapata himself.

Zapata was asleep. Outside his tent a guard stood watching. But humans cannot guard against the spirit world. Zapata felt a hand brush his cheek. He awoke, startled. A spectral form hovered near his pallet. A hollow voice proclaimed: "I am Madero. In life I fought you; in death I warn you. Beware how you play into the hands of Japan! For so sure as you yield and join the traitors who would give Mexico's beloved lands to that country, so surely shall you die. I have spoken. Beware!"

Slowly, slowly the phantom dissolved before Zapata's eyes. He was alone. But Japan never would cajole him into signing an agreement for land cessions now! And, slain in April, he never signed. Uncommunicative as he was, Zapata nevertheless could not refrain from calling in his guard and telling him. The tale spread like wildfire.

And on its heels Jack Harding, not

the least able of the three ablest men in the United States secret service, drifted back into Mexico City on the selfsame night that his companions, Brady and Sprague, arrived in the airplane of Sato Nagati.

Harding was sitting in his hotel room, scanning a newspaper, when Brady and Sprague entered. On the floor lay a Mexican costume he had worn in his peregrinations through the bandit districts. On the bed he had carelessly thrown a wig of matted black hair. His face was a huge grin as he rose to welcome his comrades in peril.

"Got your telepathic flashes the moment I hit the city," he said, shaking hands with Sprague and Brady. "Sit down."

"We've got Sato on the run," said Sprague. "He's scared."

"And his machine?" asked Harding.

"Hidden in a patch of woods three miles out—a place where nobody is likely to stumble on it—off the southwest road. You know the place?"

Harding nodded. "No one likely to see it there," he commented. "How did you get the machine?"

Brady told him; then asked Harding for his story.

"Well," drawled Jack, "I played the astral projection stuff on the peons—told them in telepathic 'whispers' that I was Madero's ghost or Diaz's shade or Huerta—according to my whim and the district I was in. I even got near enough to slip my astral body into Zapata's tent to warn him against Japan."

Sprague nodded admiringly. "I was wondering what your plan was," he said. "I knew you'd play the astral game, but I never thought of such a stunt as impersonating the spirits of the dead leaders. Some stunt, eh, Brady?"

Brady expressed his admiration for Harding's cleverness and daring, but the latter waived their plaudits, embarrassed. "The thing we've got to do,"

he said slowly, "is to catch this Sato Nagati."

"Easier said than done," commented Sprague. "But I agree with you; we must—or——"

"Good-by, Monroe Doctrine!" sang out Brady.

"And Mexico," added Harding.

For nearly two hours the trio discussed their dangerous mission and plans to bring it to fruition in favor of the administration and of America. Then, with cordial handclasps, they separated, each man going to his hotel, Brady first borrowing one of Harding's suits in exchange for his Mexican bandit costume, but retaining his facial disguise and assuming a fictitious name in registering at a small hostelry.

Next day the three men expectantly began a search for Sato Nagati. But Sato was not in Mexico City.

"Probably hasn't arrived yet," growled Harding. "Let's take the day off and have a little relaxation."

The three men accordingly passed an enjoyable day, giving no thought whatever to their mission lest it spoil their pleasure. Harding invited Brady and Sprague to his room for a game of pinochle and they assented. Sprague somehow felt uneasy as they approached Harding's room. Some prescience of evil bade him be cautious. Whatever caused him to do so he could not explain, but he urged Brady and Harding, in a whisper, to stoop low, and set them an example by doing so himself.

Harding placed his key in the latch, his head lower than the keyhole. Turning the key, he pushed the door open.

As he did so out blazed a flash of light, a shot crashed, and a bullet *nipped* over their heads.

Still crouching, Harding, Sprague, and Brady rushed into the room, revolvers drawn.

Not a living soul was in sight!

CHAPTER X.

THE GHOST WATCH.

HARDING'S room had two windows. It was situate on the second floor of the hotel and was rather large. It was furnished with two desks, "twin beds," comfortable chairs, screens, and other comforts. A bathroom, used conjointly by Harding and the occupant of the room adjacent to his, lay between the two rooms.

Harding rushed to the door of this bathroom, stooping before opening it, lest another shot lay him low. Sprague, with a pantherlike spring, sought a window and glanced down to see if any one were running off. Not a person was in sight. Brady, gun ready to fire, searched behind the screen and under the beds. But their efforts were unavailing. Whoever fired the shot must have had some means of escape other than the bathroom or the windows.

A trapdoor through the floor? The thought struck Sprague as he turned from the window and called to Harding: "Nobody here."

"Here, either," returned Harding.

"Must have been a trapdoor," Sprague remarked. The three men accordingly glanced about the floor, seeking telltale saw marks or crevices. What they did see caused them to gasp with astonishment at the simplicity of the device set for their assassination.

In their rush into the room they naturally had sought a human form, and then hastened to points of egress, entirely overlooking what they now gazed upon.

Directly in their path had lain and still lay a wooden lath, one of the ordinary, rough-edged laths used by carpenters in forming a basis for the plastering of walls. It lay near a revolver which had been fastened to the floor, L-shaped screws, such as housewives use for holding curtain rods in place,

being utilized to keep the gun in position. Beneath the trigger guard had been placed a tiny block, raising the muzzle to an angle nicely calculated to send a shot directly into a man's heart as he opened the door. The lath apparently had been used to cause a pressure on the trigger, exactly as a human finger would have been used. It had been braced against the door, the other end against the trigger, so that the moment the door was pushed inward the pressure would force the lath against the trigger and cause the revolver to belch forth its leaden death.

The men stared at one another in silence. Then they solemnly shook hands.

"Thank God, you thought to bend low," said Harding to Sprague.

"I don't know why I did, nor why I warned you fellows, but something seemed to tell me everything wasn't quite right. My mind was uneasy the moment we hit the landing," explained Sprague. "I had a subconscious feeling danger was near us—and it was."

"Let's have a look at that gun," said Harding as Brady picked it up.

Brady handed it to him and Harding "broke" it, removing the cartridges from the barrel.

"The fool wasted these good cartridges, anyway," he grinned, slipping them into his pocket, together with the empty shell.

"What make is it?" asked Sprague, referring to the revolver.

"American," he said, reading off the name of a well-known revolver and gun-making firm. "Sato knows a good gun, anyway."

"Let's look the room over a bit," said Sprague.

"What for?" asked Brady.

"Footprints—fingerprints—something to help us."

Harding produced a magnifying glass. So did the others. They examined the revolver, but found dull blurs

only. The screws likewise held no distinct impressions. The doorknob revealed nothing. It was apparent the villain who had set the trap had worn rubber gloves.

Sprague directed his attention to the floor. Here he was rewarded. Shoe prints—rather small—were impressed distinctly in the rug near the bed and upon the dust on the varnished floor. He measured them carefully, jotting down the accurate memoranda. There were no peculiar marks about the imprints. They were clear, smooth, and distinct, as though made by a new shoe.

"Sato's," murmured Sprague, while the other two men nodded.

They went downstairs. Apparently the shot had not been heard, or, if it had, no one had been alarmed. They learned that a Japanese had called to see Mr. Harding, and when told Harding was out had asked and obtained permission to slip a note under his door.

"Anything wrong?" asked the clerk. "I thought I heard a shot."

"I dropped my gun," said Harding.

The trio went upstairs. Sprague suggested reporting to the police, but Harding, who was smoking hard at his abominable pipe, immediately frowned down this plan.

"We'd better keep quiet," he said decisively. "It can't happen to us again—unless we're fools."

"What do you mean, Harding?" asked Brady.

"Mean? Why, all we've got to do is to send an astral advance guard ahead of us to look over the ground," he said. "In other words, apply your own astral body to the task in your case, Brady; you yours, Sprague, and I'll do the same, in the event of our working separately at any time or in entering our rooms."

The other two brightened at the suggestion.

"Incidentally, Harding," Sprague

said, "we ought to keep a close watch for a return visit. Why not keep our astral bodies on guard here continually?"

"Too exhausting," he commented. "Why not just the head?"

"Eh?" cried the other two, astounded.

"Just so," he answered quietly. "I've been experimenting, and have found it possible to slip an astral eye, a finger, a toe, the whole head, a leg—in fact, any portion of my body—wherever I wish to send it. It doesn't tire so much as sending the whole astral body."

They stared at Harding in amazement.

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Brady.

"Sure? Just watch me!" he laughed.

They noted the peculiar look in his eyes as he concentrated his mental energies for the task. "Now, Sprague," he said, "look over there—in the corner."

Sprague and Brady both glanced where he indicated. Harding's face appeared, outlined perfectly against the background of wall paper. No body supported the head, but the eyes winked and the spectral face smiled!

"Bully!" cried Sprague. "How do you do it?"

"Very simply," he said, recalling to his physical entity the apparition he had projected into the corner. "You merely exert your projecting power in divisions. For instance, to send the entire astral body from you, you must exert your entire thought over every portion of your body. Subconsciously the mind thinks of every portion in this case. Now, by merely deciding to project your head—or your eyes or ears or hand, and so on—you merely concentrate on them alone instead of the whole body. Try it."

Brady and Sprague both tried the experiment. Sprague projected his astral hand to the corner where Harding's face had appeared. It was clearly defined, and, at Sprague's will, opened

and closed its ghostly fingers. Brady sent his eye in projection to another corner, and found it easy to control it to wink or close its lids and do other seemingly impossible things. They were astounded by the ease with which they could accomplish these marvels, and congratulated Harding on his discovery.

"You see," said Harding, "we can leave one eye here to watch for the next visitor, if any other visitor comes to try another shot at us. If we take turns, we can do it without fatigue. The ocular vision of the astral eye communicates what it sees immediately to our minds. And meantime we can search for Sato."

"Correct," said Sprague. "We might as well start right now."

Thereafter the men maintained this ghostly watch over their rooms. But while no further visit was made by any hostile agent, Harding and Sprague felt ever and anon the tentacles of Sato's super-mind reaching into their brains for information, and they were hard put to it to prevent his learning their plans. Brady, whom Sato still believed dead, did not experience this mental intrusion.

Four of the precious ten days before the fruition of the Jap's dastardly plan to make a revolutionary attack on Mexico City had passed. Only six days more remained in which to combat him and prevent his master mind from leading the banditti into concerted action.

Brady had slipped away to continue Harding's method of arousing the peons against the attack on the government, lest Japan get a foothold in Mexico through the bandits' success.

Harding and Sprague gloomily discussed their failure to find Sato. Harding puffed vigorously at his vile pipe, adding to Sprague's mental misery with each puff, until finally Sprague began to stalk up and down the room, glar-

ing at Harding's apparent comfort. He was sitting in his accustomed pose, feet on desk, chair tipped backward, eyes raised to ceiling. Sprague often had envied his apparent phlegmatism in hours of stress, but this afternoon he experienced an irritation which threatened to weave words he might regret uttering. So, taking counsel of prudence, he told Harding he was going downstairs to buy a newspaper.

Harding must have divined Sprague's mood, but he also was irascible, and made no comment, continuing his provoking puffing.

Downstairs trudged Sprague, desiring nothing more than to walk himself out of his mood, if walking would do it. He approached the exit, and was about to step into the street when he suddenly beheld—Sato, the man for whom all three had been making such an unavailing search!

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

SATO did not so much as glance at the entrance to the hotel he was passing—the place where he had set a trap for the death of one or more of his enemies. His walk was as nonchalant as though he were on a holiday promenade. Sprague stood in a daze, and thereby nearly lost sight of his quarry, for Sato had rounded the corner some seven doors away before Sprague had recovered from his astonishment.

Sprague almost ran to the corner, and was agreeably relieved to see his prey walking apparently without any thought that he possibly was being followed. The American used every possible device for shadowing his man, and succeeded in trailing him to a private house some six blocks from Harding's hotel. Sprague first had decided to arrest him, but had changed his mind,

wishing to discover, if possible, some tangible evidence of the plot Sato was weaving. He knew Sato would deny everything and that Mexico would give the Jap the benefit of the doubt—for fear of Japan. So he loitered around as inconspicuously as possible until nearly an hour elapsed. Then Sato reappeared. The Jap glanced furtively around as he descended the steps of the house. He had changed his suit, Sprague noticed. This, then, must be his residence.

Sprague decided it would be much better not to dog his steps. He apparently was going out upon some social call, unsuspecting of danger. It would be far preferable if he could gain entrance to the house Sato occupied and snoop about a bit to discover anything discoverable, decided Sprague. Accordingly, he watched the Jap walk several blocks down the street and turn a corner.

Sprague studied the house Sato had left. It seemed the least likely place in the world for a murderer's abode. The windows were curtained with beautiful lace drapings. A few pieces of furniture were visible—that is, the upper parts of them—and they were of ornate design and apparently expensive.

It was evident to Sprague, after carefully pondering the matter, that Sato, delving into the most dangerous waters of international affairs, would be well protected from intrusion. He unquestionably would have secret alarms for unwary hands or feet to touch, or some unseen protectors other than ordinary servants. Sprague felt an inclination to summon Harding to aid him, but smothered the inclination as soon as it was born when he thought of Harding's irritating pipe. Besides, while a foolish resolve, the human element of selfishness where glory is concerned entered Sprague's mind. He believed he could do the exploit alone,

and caution fled before the enchantment hazard lent to this adventure.

So he determined to pit himself, single-handed, against the power which had demonstrated its might and crossed the street to the house, deciding an open, bold course was the better one to take.

He strode up the steps to the landing and pressed an electric push button. He heard a bell ring faintly, far in the rear of the house, and waited patiently for some one to open the door. A minute passed, which he counted second by second, his heart beating wildly despite his apparent external calm. Somehow his ardor for adventure cooled in that minute of tense waiting. But no one came to the door and he rang again, this time a little longer. Then he waited again—one minute—two minutes—three minutes. There was no response.

"No one home, I guess," muttered Sprague.

He paused, hesitant what next to do. Then, with a summoning of all his nerve, he entered the vestibule and grasped the doorknob. He turned it. To his surprise the latch clicked and he felt the door yield to his gentle pressure, opening inward. This was luck, indeed!

Sprague entered swiftly, and softly closed the door. The hall was rather dark, evening being near and no light lit in the hallway or on the stairway which reached before him upward to regions he yearned to explore. A feeling of awe crept upon him—a wonderment akin to terror—an impulse to turn and flee. But he sternly repressed this impulse and slid against the wall, every sense alert. No sound broke the silence—unless the ticking of a clock somewhere in the house could be termed a sound.

He made several strides forward, cautiously, silently, stealthily. At the entrance to the drawing-room, Sprague

glanced in. It was deserted. It held no interest for him. Sprague was certain that whatever of value was to be discovered would be revealed in those chambers upstairs, not here, where every chance visitor might stumble upon things not meant for his eyes.

Emboldened by his apparent security, Sprague stepped across the doorway and reached the opposite side of it, where he again slunk against the wall. By this time he was within a few steps of the foot of the stairway. He made the necessary strides forward and reached the first step, upon which he gingerly placed his right foot.

Hardly had he touched it when the hall was flooded in radiant light and Sprague felt an electric current pulsating through his system like daggers thrust into every nerve.

And as he struggled to free himself from the grip of the electricity Sprague felt the world go black. He heard a mocking laugh, then he felt himself falling—falling—falling into endless abysses—and knew no more!

CHAPTER XII.

A CHOICE OF DEATHS.

A DAZZLING beam of light, brighter than mortal eyes ever beheld; then intense darkness, dank, impalpable, tomblike; the ringing of distant bells; anon rumbles of thunder crashing and reverberating amid far-off clouds; then silence again, deep, profound, terrifying; a dizzying whirl of worlds, a blinding flash again—and Sprague awoke from the deathlike swoon into which he had fallen—awoke to find himself bound hand and foot, a gag in his mouth and shooting pains in his eyes, preventing his seeing anything for a few moments.

Gradually his vision cleared and he made out a small room, lined with sheet iron riveted against the walls, and an iron door barely large enough for a man

to enter sidewise and not quite five feet high. An electric light burned above, set in the ceiling, which, Sprague noticed, likewise was ironclad. The air was foul and heavy, although not damp, and he realized he must be in some underground prison artificially aired, but not sufficiently so to be comfortable.

He strained at his bonds, but they were too well fastened. Each struggle but caused the cords to cut deeper into his wrists and ankles. Sprague cursed the folly which had led him into this trap set by Sato Nagati. What hope for him, thus bound and hidden from all possibility of human ear to hear or human eye to see? Why had he not counseled with Harding? Why had he been such an unmitigated fool as to presume he had the intelligence and power alone to cope with such a gifted enemy as this Jap, who had trapped him?

He gazed helplessly about the room. His temples felt as though they must burst. He pressed his teeth against the gag, only to desist because of the pain caused by gritting them against steel. His jaws ached, his wrists were swollen to abnormal size, and his ankles caused him excruciating agony.

The silence appalled him. Rather would Sprague have heard the din of battle, the clangor of iron foundries, anything but this sepulchral quiet. It made him feel as though he were in a tomb. Well, what else was it but a tomb? he thought bitterly. And he had wilfully stepped into it. Again he gritted his teeth impotently against the gag. Again he had to desist.

Reason slowly was returning and teaching him the folly of uselessly wasting his strength. He lay quietly then, and tried to find some ray of hope upon which to hinge a chance of deliverance. But the more he thought the more hopeless he considered the outlook. No one knew where he was;

no one knew he had stalked Sato to the mysterious house invaded so incautiously; no one was aware even of his disappearance, because it could not yet have been prolonged enough to arouse alarm. And when Harding and Brady would find him—if they ever did find him—it would be too late to help him who had been Walter Sprague, secret-service agent of the United States government.

The pain of his bonds nearly made him swoon again, and, despite his effort to prevent it, Sprague gave vent to a deep groan through his gag. No sooner had he done so than the little door opened and a Japanese face peered through the aperture, grinning at him. The upper half of the face was covered with a mask. Sprague almost laughed at the apparition because of this, to him, absurd attempt to conceal an identity from a man hopelessly entangled in a mesh from which escape was impossible.

The face disappeared; the door closed.

Hideous as had been the grin on the lips and malevolent the look in the eyes peering through the mask, Sprague felt he far rather would see it than lie thus, without even an enemy to interest his fancies. He groaned again, this time louder. Again the door opened. Again the face with its grin. Sprague gave a loud moan of anguish, exaggerated but real.

The door opened and the masked Jap entered. He was not more than five feet six inches tall. He was slenderly built, slope-shouldered, wiry, and quick. He wore a black serge suit and patent-leather shoes. Only his uncovered jet hair, yellow skin, and black eyes betrayed his origin. Otherwise he might have passed for some stripling youth to be encountered anywhere in America. He came toward Sprague, catlike in tread and manner.

"You suffer, sir, eh?" he said purr-

ingly, rubbing his hands. "It is not safe to combat Japan's wishes. Many have tried; many have died! But I shall spare your life if you tell me where I can find my airplane." He paused, his smile turning to a sinister scowl and his beady black eyes gloating over his victim. Wondering what great significance attached to the recovery of the plane, but determined never to reveal its whereabouts, Sprague shook his head in a vigorous negative.

"Then you must die!" exclaimed the Jap. "I am sorry, but you are in the way. I am going to be merciful to you, though, because you are a brave man."

Again he paused. Sprague wondered what fiendishness was originating in the ingenious brain of his enemy.

"Seldom do I give mercy when foes are in my power," continued the Jap, "especially when they refuse to tell what I would know. But I shall break my rule this time—only this time. I shall get my information from Harding. But I forgot—pardon me, sir—that you cannot reply to me." He stooped and deftly released the gag. "You need not call for help," he told Sprague. "You are fifty feet below the surface. You would only waste your voice. Be reasonable, as a brave man should, as I know you will be." His voice had a purring sound, much like a cat's comfortably fed. Sprague ground his teeth in impotent rage. The Jap smiled graciously.

"I feel the kindness of your heart toward me," he said, "and I am touched. Indeed, it moves me to give you another choice than the two I had intended to give you——"

"Choices?" muttered Sprague. "Choices of what?"

"Of how you wish to die," the Jap replied smoothly, without a trace of emotion. "Isn't that a kindness—when I could blot you out in a moment for

refusing to restore my airplane? I shall give you three choices. You can choose either—without hindrance. You can take the easiest or the hardest, as you will. No one ever will know which one you choose, because when I leave you I shall not return. No one but myself—those who built this place are dead, because their knowledge of it was dangerous—knows about this little room. I even shall go so far as to release you from the bonds that keep your hands from trying to kill me."

He laughed, a rasping, malignant laugh of triumph.

"Are you Sato Nagati?" asked Sprague. "But I know you are. Why use a mask?"

The Jap removed it, preening himself. "I am," he said almost gently. "I am the scourge of your government—the genius of Japan—the beloved of the mighty Emperor of Nippon!"

Sprague watched him, fascinated. "Why are you the scourge of my country?" he asked.

"All Japanese hate America," said Sato bitterly, "because America refuses them citizenship—refuses to recognize them as equals, when they are superiors." Then, glaring at Sprague, he shouted: "You white dog! Why should I give you mercy—you who would crush out the light of Japan? You who would strike at me, and, through me, at Japan?" Of a sudden he calmed. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said genially, his mood again sarcastically kind. "Whenever I think of the ostracism America and other white nations exercise against my country I become excited. So would you, eh? Especially when any one humiliates your country, yes? You understand, is it not so?" He bared his teeth in a manner that reminded Sprague of a dog showing its fangs. "I must go, sir," continued the Jap. "I am so sorry, because you are a good listener. I al-

most regret that your ears soon will never hear again——”

“What?” cried Sprague. “You will deafen me?”

“Ah, sir, you wrong me!” exclaimed Sato. “I never torture an enemy. No, your ears will not be injured, nor will you be hurt in any way by me. That is my kindness, when I should be stern and merciless. I wonder at myself, sir; yet I ever was given to admire courage, and you are brave. No, your ears will never hear again—after you are dead!” He smiled again, that tantalizing, mocking, sinister smile which first had greeted Sprague’s awakening.

“Ah,” said Sprague, smiling back at Sato, “I see what you mean.”

“You delight me, sir!”

“And now,” said the American, “what are the choices you shall give me?”

“These,” said Sato. “First, I shall leave with you food sufficient to prevent your hunger or thirst for twenty-four hours.”

“In other words, my first choice is—starvation?” asked Sprague, a horror creeping upon his soul.

“Correct,” smiled Sato. “Again I am delighted at your quick perception. Second, I shall leave you a vial of colorless, tasteless fluid——”

“Poison?”

“Exactly. It kills as quickly as it is swallowed—no agony, no pain; only a falling asleep, the easiest way I can let you die. The third is not so bad, either. A box of powder, which, if you inhale it—like the Council of Nine inhaled it—will bring you calm, eternal slumber.” Sato produced from his right-hand pocket a tiny vial filled with colorless fluid. This he carefully set on the floor, some three feet from Sprague. Then he reached again into his pocket and extracted a small round box made of aluminum, in shape and size much like those given by druggists with orders of quinine pills. This he

likewise placed on the floor, next to the vial. “I shall have to go, sir,” he said softly. “I assure you I shall not remain to watch which course you take. I do not wish to gloat over my enemies when they are brave.”

Sprague watched him, too fascinated, too dazed to say a word.

“Please turn over on your side,” Sato requested, “so I may release the cord from behind. Then you can work your wrists free. Otherwise it would be impossible to do so.”

Sprague turned as directed, realizing that if he had any chance it could be possible only with freedom of movement. He felt a knife severing the bond about his midriff, which had kept his hands against his abdomen. The wild thought came to him that he might turn in a flash and grasp this fiend with his bound hands. But he dismissed this thought. It might whip Sato into a frenzy and cause him to kill his victim outright.

“Now, sir,” said Sato, moving away, “I must say good-by—and wish you the easiest death of the three. May the mighty emperor of the Samurai forgive me if I have erred in showing mercy. Once more I swear by all I hold sacred to free you—if you will tell me where to find my aëro.” Sato’s tone was anxious, and Sprague again wondered what great importance attached to a machine which Sato could duplicate with ease. But he shook his head in the negative, even more decidedly than he had shaken it before when Sato made his first request.

A bow of the slender figure, gracefully, courteously made, and Sato was gone. The door clicked behind him. Sprague was alone—alone with three chances to die—— Ha! Sato had not given the three! He had left no food!

“Sato! Sato!” shouted Sprague.

The door opened and the Jap peered in. “You will tell me—you will save yourself—my airplane?” he asked.

But Sprague shook a negative. "You have given me but two choices," he told the yellow man. "The food—where is it?"

"Ah, I had forgotten!" smiled Sato. "Pardon me. Here it is." He advanced a few feet and placed a loaf of bread and a pint flask of water on the floor. "Again, sir," he smiled, "I wish you the easiest death; you have called for the hardest! Good-by!"

CHAPTER XIII.

DESPAIR.

SATO disappeared through the iron door, and Sprague again was alone.

This time he heard a bolt slip in the lock and knew Sato meant to return no more. At first the American lay still in an apathy of despair, but he was roused from this by the pain in his wrists and ankles. Bethinking himself of Sato's suggestion that he could release himself, Sprague struggled at his bonds. It was comparatively easy to free his ankles, now that his hands were not bound against his midriff. This relief brought a more consuming desire to release his wrists. He struggled and struggled, but the cords bit deeper the more he strained at them. Yet he could not desist, if he wished to be free. So he yanked away at his bonds until blood began to pour from his wrists and drip from his finger tips. There was no protuberance in the wall against which he could rub the cord and fray it. He was beginning utterly to despair when he chanced to glance at the accursed liquid poison in the vial. He had refrained from looking at vial or box, lest he be tempted to use either to avoid suffering. Now he laughed, laughed like a madman first, then with more sanity as he thought what an idiotic exhibition he had made of himself and the unnecessary pain he had suffered.

He could have broken this vial and

cut the bonds long since with a fragment of its glass. He stooped over and picked up the vial between his bound hands, staring curiously at it. It held liquid which held instant death for the quaffer. Suppose he should break the glass and spill the fluid; one of his chances for easy death would be gone. He knew the time would come, unless some miracle released him, that he would rave around the cell, praying God to bring him death and that he then would be happy by a mere draft to ease forever the pangs of flesh. Even as he stared the temptation came to take this course now, before suffering untold horrors of starvation. Fifty feet below the surface of the street, in a place known to but one man in the world—what chance had he to expect succor? He continued to stare at the flask without making a move to destroy it. Such was his fascination that he forgot his pain. Thus he stood for a long time, held in thrall by thoughts full of melancholy and hopelessness. Then, heaving a sigh, the better nature of him triumphed over this fatalism and he tapped the flask gently against the wall. It did not break or crack with the first contact. He was about to try again, a little harder, so as not to smash the glass into fragments too small for his purpose, when another thought came upon him, this time giving him a literal understanding of the expression, "freezing one's marrow." Suppose the bottle held a fluid which, released to the air, would cause death by inhalation of its fumes as well as by imbibing it?

Sprague in horror withheld his hand and considered this possibility. It was a master stroke of Machiavellian cunning thus to leave a flask with which Sprague might sever his bonds—if he lived to sever them! Sato evidently had calculated on just such a situation. Probably even now he was laughing over his jest, thought Sprague bitterly.

Awakened now to the possibilities of this vial, which had become a thing most precious to be protected, Sprague gripped it tightly, yet fearful of pressing too strenuously lest it break and envelop him in fumes of doom.

Then the pain of his bonds gnawed again at his resolution to avoid breaking the glass. His hands were swollen and blue, smeared with blood, some freshly red, some blackly clotted. He bit his lips in frenzy. The agony of his wounds added to the horror of his plight, and he stormed the room in torture. He actually wept with the pain and hopelessness of it all.

Finally, when he could bear no more, he decided to trust to the honor of even such a fiend as Sato, and to break the vial. There was no use holding his nostrils tight as he broke the glass, but he did so instinctively, trusting to God to help him in his hour of direst need. He knew he must release his nostrils ultimately. In this awkward position, both hands to his face, he broke the vial against the wall. The fluid splashed on the floor. Were it not so tragic the spectacle Sprague presented would have been amusing, both hands tied tightly together, the fingers of one gripping his nose, the fingers of the other holding the upper half of a broken vial a few inches from that same proboscis, unable to move either hand away for fear of inhaling deathly fumes, yet unable to risk dropping the precious glass for fear it might shatter to bits too small to be useful.

But a man must breathe, and Sprague knew he could not hold out much longer before requiring air. He hurried across the room as far away as he could get from the wet stains on the floor and the splashes on the wall where he had broken the vial. Then, holding out to the last possible moment, Sprague ventured to release his nostrils. His face was nearly purple before he dared to inhale. Had death then come to him

he would not have cared much, so overwrought was he. But death did not come, and he rejoiced that he had taken the chance.

Sprague sat and pressed the precious fragment of glass between his knees, jagged edge upward. Then, ever so carefully, he drew across the sharp glass the tautened cords binding his wrists until the strands began to snap one by one and he was free. But now came a sharper pain—the return of blood to the extremities cut off so long from circulation. So agonizing was this pain that Sprague deliberately sacrificed some of his precious pint of water to allay the agony.

To regain his strength he boxed with an imaginary opponent, chafed his wrists and ankles, ran around the room and turned somersaults until complete, normal circulation had been restored. Hunger came, but he fought against his desire to eat of the precious loaf. Thirst began to gnaw at his throat. His exertions had stimulated both thirst and appetite, and it required all Sprague's will power to refrain from eating and drinking. But in the end he conquered. He did not know how long he had been without food. There was no time measurement in this living tomb. Only æons could measure the passage of the hours, so infinitely long did each moment seem. His watch had stopped many hours since, and he might have been without food for a century, judging by the ravenous hunger upon him. Often he had fasted for two days, but never under such conditions as these. What with thirst, hunger, pain, hopelessness, he felt no inclination to fight much longer. Yet so strong is the urge of self-preservation that he fought down this subconscious inclination to yield.

Ultimately, worn out with the riot of emotion and the strenuous physical experiences he had undergone, Sprague fell asleep. Dreams came, banishing

real rest. Horrible nightmares, wild beyond the wildest fancies, haunted him throughout his slumber, so that he was really more tired than refreshed when he awoke. Incidentally, he was hungrier and thirstier.

He began to gloat over the bottle and loaf as though he were hoarding the riches of a Midas. He fondled the bottle and caressed the loaf, taking deep, longing sniffs of its crust, until, in an ecstasy of self-denial, he fairly shrieked. Nor will the reader wonder at Sprague's suffering when told that Sprague up to this period had been confined in the dungeon for nearly four days. Add to this the fact that he had eaten but a light breakfast and even lighter luncheon the day he fell into this trap, and some conception is possible of his sufferings as he knelt before the bottle, bowed and scraped before the bread, and grinned idiotically at the walls and ceiling of his cell. Not a hope for rescue! How could any one reach him? thought Sprague wildly. The question dinned into his ears—dinned—dinned—dinned—until he finally ceased his madcap antics and grasped the bread in frenzied hands and took a great bite, chewing it ravenously. Then he let half the water trickle down his parched throat. This restored him to reason and calm. He studied every crevice in the walls, where rivets held together the sheet-iron sections. They offered no hope. The door resisted his utmost strength, not even rattling in its firm framing. The ceiling was just high enough to be out of reach, nor could he hope to gain anything by piercing it, anyway. He reasoned he would encounter an arched bit of brickwork supporting the fifty feet of earth above the cell.

Hours passed and nature craved for more food, more drink. The same struggle began again, this time more horrible, more poignant with suffering, more distracting than before, and with

less hope left because half his provender was gone. Thus again Sprague was reduced to a madman's plight, until he again yielded and ate and drank what remained of the Jap's meager allowance. Truly had Sato spoken, thought Sprague. This was the hardest death!

And now, indeed, hope seemed entirely lost. He sat, gloomy-eyed, gaunt, haggard, glowering at the tiny aluminum box of powder in the center of the room. He could bear little more. He was a wreck, hardly able to drag himself across the floor. At first he shrank against the wall in the farthest corner to avoid the fascination of the powder box. But gradually, ever so gradually, he moved toward it, until finally he tremblingly grasped the tempting receptacle. His teeth chattered. One breath of this powder and then—peace!

Sprague stared hungrily at it, as he had stared at the last morsel of bread ere he had consumed it. Then timidly he began slowly, ever so slowly, to loose the metal top from the under portion of the box.

He had it halfway off!

Nerving himself for a sudden grabbing away of the lid—the inhaling of a hasty breath, his nose close to the box—Sprague breathed a prayer to God for forgiveness, a prayer for the punishment of Sato Nagati; then drew the lid three-quarters of the way off—a little farther—a little farther—till barely a thread line of space remained for his fatal inhalation of the death fumes, when—God! He thought of his wonderful mental power—his astral projections—his thought communications with Harding by telepathy!

In a panic of dread lest he be too late, he snapped back the lid on the dreadful box, and with trembling fingers laid it on the floor. Then, with every energy left to him, Sprague sent out his mental S O S to Harding.

"Come to me, Harding; I am dying!" he sent speeding his telepathic communication. "Come! Come quickly!"

He projected his astral eye to Harding's chamber, and saw him sitting at his desk, head between hands, deep sighs fluttering his lips, tears dropping on the blotter before him. Sprague then projected his astral head directly on the desk in front of Harding and saw his startled stare. Then, across space, through walls and sheet iron and fifty feet of earth, Sprague heard his telepathic response: "Coming! Hold on! Where are you?"

With his astral vision Sprague saw Harding's face brighten with hope; saw him rise and spring to the telephone, then hesitate.

"I haven't enough strength left to continue my astral projections," Sprague flashed mentally and withdrew his astral head.

"Where are you?" came Harding's repeated telepathic query.

"Fifty feet under earth," Sprague flashed back, "in a room lined with sheet iron, in the grip of Sato, almost starved to death. The room is under the house at — Street. I shall hold out now until there is no hope. Come! Come! Come!"

Sprague fell exhausted, face down, nor could he rise again when he essayed to do so. He barely had strength left to receive Harding's last mental call: "I'm coming—hold on!" Then came unconsciousness mercifully to ease his torment, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAUGH OF SATO.

HAZY in effect, yet subtly intrusive, Sprague began to feel a mind working upon his as he slowly returned to consciousness and realization that he had a chance for life. It was a questioning force. Gradually he made out that the telepathic voice was asking in-

sistently: "Where is my airplane? Where is my airplane? Where is my airplane?" and then he knew the mind of Sato Nagati, relying upon his weakness, was anticipating an answer. Instantly Sprague made his mind a blank. Then he began to feel a paralyzing influence, and it dawned upon him that Sato was trying by mental force to kill him even as the Mexican senator, Villa's bandit, Tono Yati, and the dogs had been slain. In horror Sprague braced himself to counteract the influence, and finally knew he had succeeded. Then he caught Harding's telepathic flash: "Coming—hold on!" and returned a feeble reply. After a while he managed to creep to the wall, and braced himself against it, sitting up. In this position he felt stronger.

Harding was coming—coming with help to force the dungeon door! The very thought brought new vigor to Sprague, and he trembled with eagerness. But he was too weak long to endure such excitement, and he determined to exercise the same phlegmatism which had sustained Harding in many a serious predicament. He realized that he needed every atom of strength to combat the paralyzing influence of Sato's mentality, which he could feel again, seeking continually to find Sprague off his guard.

Suddenly, however, this influence ceased. Sprague experienced a wild hope that Harding might be near—that his immediate rescue would take place. Gradually he became drowsy, despite his hope and will. He slept a few moments, then awoke with a start. A thought had come to him in sleep that he could use his astral power to guide Harding to him—that he could use his astral eye to learn the route to the underground dungeon!

In the sudden strength of a new joy Sprague projected his astral eyes beyond the iron door and saw a narrow space, not more than eight feet

square. Directly opposite the outer side of the door he saw an opening, doorless, apparently the inlet to a shaft upward. This proved correct, and with astral vision Sprague glanced up the dark shaft. But he could not discern anything in the black void. In the light reflected from his electric bulb, sifting through a crack in the door, Sprague was able to see the faint outlines of metal runners on either side the shaft, however, indicating it was an ordinary elevator shaft. This lift, then, had been used to carry his unconscious body down to the cell, Sprague reasoned. The lift must be at the top, having been used by Sato in leaving this place. He found this conjecture true also when he recalled his astral eyes and projected his astral hands along the runners to the top, where he could feel the bottom of the lift.

Satisfied on this point, Sprague recalled his astral hands and projected his eyes outward from the shaft and into the house where he had been made prisoner. He scrutinized the wall, but found no trace of an opening nor any break in the wall paper. The opening, however, must have been here. He determined so to guide Harding that the searching party would break through the wall here and find the lift in the shaft ready to carry them down to rescue him.

Sprague recalled his astral eyes, and set about the task of finding the means which ventilated his room. Search as he would, however, he could not discover how the chamber was ventilated, nor did he ever learn. And now, tired from his exertions in the astral field, Sprague again felt sleepy, and was beginning to nod when he suddenly felt Harding's mental processes again at work upon his.

"We're rushing the house!" came Harding's flash.

"Hurry!" flashed back the prisoner.

Then Sprague exerted himself no more, unable to bear up under the strain, and determined that he would reserve his last remaining strength for the ordeal of guiding Harding by astral means to the blank wall which must be demolished to reach the shaft. Some minutes later Harding flashed:

"We're in the house. Nobody here."

Sprague roused himself and sent eager reply: "I shall send my astral body as guide."

He knew it would require every iota of his remaining strength to accomplish his purpose, but he tackled the task with grim determination. He succeeded in sending his astral body to the room where Harding and twenty Mexican policemen were gathered. He saw the fearful glances the gendarmes cast at his apparition. Several devoutly crossed themselves as though to ward off the Evil One. Harding, however, explained, and they gathered courage. Sprague's astral hand then pointed to the wall. Harding nodded—Sprague could see everything with his astral eyes—and waited for more information. Sprague made his astral lips say, while his telepathic message likewise followed suit: "Cut through—elevator shaft and lift."

Then came oblivion, as Sprague, on the verge of collapse, recalled his astral form before it might be too late and fell in a dead faint on the floor of his dungeon.

Harding told him afterward how his rescue was accomplished. "The day you left me to get a newspaper," explained Harding when Sprague was fully recovered from his terrifying experiences, "I knew you were disgruntled. I attributed it to the strain under which we had been laboring. When you did not return for supper I thought you were giving yourself time to work off your grouch. But when day succeeded day, without your re-

appearance, I became frantic with fear. I sent telepathic calls to longer distances than we ever had attempted, but got no response——"

"I was fifty feet down," smiled Sprague. "No wonder. Your concentration was all above ground."

"Well," continued Harding, "I got the Mexican police, secret-service men, everybody possible, on the job to look for you. I had given up hope when your astral head appeared. Why didn't you let me know sooner?"

"I could have done so," admitted Sprague shamefacedly, "but I forgot all about my powers until the last desperate moment. Even then I don't know what caused me to remember. I was so distracted that I lost all control, I guess."

"Well, that's past now," said Harding soothingly.

"And the airplane?" asked Sprague with sudden thought of the importance the Jap evidently attached to his machine.

"Safe and sound—where we left it."

"Sato was very anxious about that machine," said Sprague. "We'd better search it. It may give us some surprises."

"Well, we can do that when we please," said Harding. "The main thing is to give this devil Sato a taste of American justice."

"You can just bet we will!" cried Sprague, grasping Harding's hand with enthusiasm.

And then, despite their nerve and courage, both men blanched as a hollow laugh sounded in their ears!

"Sato!" they exclaimed, then stared.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EVE OF REVOLUTION.

THAT night came Brady, haggard, weary, almost dropping from fatigue, to report that the revolution had been put off for three days for some

purpose or reason he had not been able to learn. Harding explained how Sprague had been captured and rescued, and attributed the delay in Sato's plans to his anxiety for the stolen airplane and his remaining in Mexico City until he should have obtained information of its whereabouts.

"The Mexican authorities are seeking Sato everywhere, since an uncontrovertible charge can be brought against him by Sprague," said Harding. "Even the Japanese embassy cannot lift a hand for Sato under the circumstances, lest it appear to condone Sato's murderous activities. But so far search has been futile. We shall have to take him ourselves, if we can find him."

"A thought strikes me on this point," said Sprague eagerly.

The two men glanced at their leader. "The Jap has been able to reach our minds," he explained as they nodded. "We have never been able to reach his. But we might be able to, eh?"

"What's the dope?" asked Harding.

"If we coöperate and criss-cross our telepathic lines, as it were, we may be able to find him. Suppose, for instance, you, Harding, go to the southern end of the city and cast your telepathic influence in a radius of three miles. I shall go to the northern end and do the same. Brady can tackle the western end. If this fails to find the Jap, even by the slightest mental impression, he must be somewhere in the eastern part of town. We can then draw our lines nearer to each other, and, by a triple concentration in a smaller area, find exactly where Sato is hiding."

"And suppose we find him—what then?" quizzed Harding.

"Arrest him."

Harding laughed outright. "Do you think that fiend would be taken alive?" he ridiculed. "I guess not!"

"Alive or dead—it doesn't matter," said Sprague.

"Well," admitted Harding, "it does

sound feasible, after all. If he can reach us we certainly should be able to reach him."

"Especially with three minds working at once," added Brady.

Next morning Harding, Sprague, and Brady took their posts as scheduled and began the weirdest search ever made in all history. They worked carefully, and could feel each other's mental flashes. But not a token of Sato's presence was indicated. Slowly they converged to an agreed rendezvous, and by two o'clock in the afternoon were so close to each other that Sprague flashed the others to join him.

When the trio had gathered Sprague said: "It is evident Sato isn't in those three quarters. I'll stay here and flash for Sato while you fellows take the posts agreed on last night in the remaining district. Work toward me, but go slowly and carefully, lest we miss the Jap."

The two he addressed separated and went to their stations, resuming their occult scouring of the city's remaining quarter. At four o'clock Sprague caught an excited flash from Brady: "Close in!" came his call. "I've located him on — Street!"

Sprague flashed the message to Harding, and the three men in a few minutes merged forces in the street Brady had named.

"It's the fourth house from the corner," said Brady excitedly, leading his companions to it. The building was a small frame one, two stories high. "He's in there—asleep," said Brady.

Sprague turned to Harding. "Call up the chief of police," he said. "Ask him for ten men. Brady and I will keep guard until they come. We may get him alive. We must have enough men to cut off every avenue of escape. Hurry!"

Harding dashed off. In a few moments he returned with the information that police autos were rushing to the

place. Five minutes later the police cars rounded the corner and dashed toward the three Americans. Sprague directed their operations.

"Two of you watch the third house," he instructed, "and two the fifth. Two more are to enter the cellar of the fourth house, where Sato is, two to the front stair and two to the rear. My two friends and I will break down the front door. There is extreme danger—so beware. When I whistle keep your eyes open."

The men hastened to their positions. Allowing five minutes for all to take their proper places, Sprague whistled loudly and the three Americans burst open the front door. Careless of danger, reckless with the mad desire of locating the man who so nearly had caused his death, Sprague sprang ahead of his men. The parlor was vacant. Harding rushed to the rear rooms. No one there, he hastened back. Sprague already was halfway up the stairs, Brady close behind. Both had drawn their revolvers and had covered their faces with handkerchiefs to ward off the throwing of any death-dealing powders. Harding hastily took the same precaution and followed hard on their heels.

They reached the landing in safety, and searched the front bedrooms. No sign of life. They dashed to the rear rooms, three in a row. Two were vacant. The door of the third was locked. Heedless of danger, the three men braced their shoulders against it and pushed mightily until it gave. As they rushed into the room they saw lying on the bed the form of Sato Nagati, apparently asleep despite the hubbub of the search.

Sprague pointed his gun at the Jap's heart. "Grab him, men!" he commanded. "I've got him covered."

Brady and Harding rushed at the sleeping figure. They extended their hands, ready to grasp the yellow fiend.

And then, even as they were about to seize him, a ghastly fear came upon them as a hollow laugh rang out—the laugh of Sato—and the figure melted into nothingness before their eyes!

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE."

THE trio stared at the bed whereon, but a moment before, a human form had been lying apparently in deep slumber. Then it flashed upon Sprague that they had seen the astral figure of Sato only, but so perfectly reproduced and so apparently substantial that it had seemed actually human. The hoax was the more readily perpetrated because of their haste. Were they trapped? Sprague scented danger.

"Out with you!" he bawled. "Warn the men downstairs!"

Harding and Brady precipitately fled, yelling a warning as they descended the stairs. Sprague was last to leave. At the door of the room he turned and glanced back. Standing in the center of it, regarding him with a smile of malevolent triumph, stood Sato Nagati!

Raging, fearless, heedless of his own caution to the others, Sprague rushed back toward the Jap, only to see the form dissolve and disappear to the accompaniment of a mocking laugh.

In sudden panic Sprague, fearing he knew not what, dashed for the door and down the stairs to the main hall. He could hear scurrying feet below rushing from the building. In mad haste he dashed for the exit and arrived safely on the veranda—just in time.

An explosion which shook the house roared above him. Sticks and plaster and other débris filled the air for a thrilling second, then descended in a dangerous downpour. The outer walls held against the blast, however, and no one was injured.

The street rapidly filled with afrighted people, who were pressed

backward by the twenty policemen. Leaving them in charge, Sprague, Harding, and Brady exerted all their concentrated powers to discover Sato's whereabouts, but to no avail.

"That devil set a time bomb for us," growled Sprague.

"And we walked into his trap like blind men," sighed Brady.

"But out of it—in time," Sprague reminded them. "We're three lucky men."

They went to Harding's hotel to discuss plans. As they entered the lobby Sprague gave a glad cry and rushed ahead. Harding and Brady stared, amazed.

Dolores Perez was rising from a rocker, eyes aglow and hands outstretched to Sprague. As Harding and Brady came up they heard Sprague saying: "But I thought you were to stay in Nogales?"

Dolores flashed a welcome smile at the newcomers, recognizing Brady as the man who had rescued her from Tono Yati. Harding she had not yet met, so Brady presented him, both men speaking Mexican.

"I was worried," she told them. "I had no word from Señor Sprague, and, besides, the general at Nogales heard of new raids to be made, and warned me to return to my uncle in Mexico City. So I came here."

"And now," said Sprague, "you're in worse danger."

Dolores flushed, and her eyes grew radiant. "So are you in danger," she murmured. Then the Spanish pride in her asserted itself: "I have no fear."

"But you don't know Sato's power," urged Sprague.

Harding noticed an angry gleam in the girl's eyes, and thought Sprague rather tactless to speak thus in his first meeting with Dolores since her rescue, although he acknowledged that Sprague was right nevertheless. Dolores was

cut to the quick by what she considered a cool welcome.

"Are you afraid, Señor Sprague?" she asked icily, although she unbent a trifle when he fervently replied: "For you only, Dolores!"

"Then I am unwelcome; I have become a burden here!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Adios!" And before Sprague's astoundment could resolve itself into speech Dolores had brushed past the men and out of the hotel.

"Some spitfire!" exclaimed Brady. "Reminds me of a little Irish girl I know. No telling what a woman'll do!"

"She'll be all right later," said Harding, patting Sprague's shoulder. "You must have hurt her pride. These Mexicans are very 'touchy,' especially the Spanish type."

But Sprague, in the sudden doldrums of a lover, glowered without reply. The other two men, wise in their generation, forbore from offering any more unwelcome comfort. Harding tactfully quit smoking his atrocious pipe, lest it jar Sprague's already taut nerves, while Brady mentally excoriated the girl for thus sorely hurting his chief with one of the unaccountable whims of a woman.

Upstairs in Harding's room, they discussed their narrow escape from the infernal machine planted by Sato Nagati.

"There's one thing we've neglected to do," said Sprague after a long interval of thought.

Harding looked his interest, while Brady pressed for an explanation.

"We haven't searched Sato's airplane," said their leader. "Let's do it—now!" He rose, eager to submerge his heart hurt in the excitement of ferreting out the Jap's secrets. Anything to get away from the memory of Dolores' unkind cut. Perhaps she might be sorry now, he thought bitterly, and might send a note calling him to her again. She had been unfair, he told

himself, inasmuch as he merely had been solicitous for her safety, not for his own.

As he and his companions sauntered forth and headed for the place where Sato's airplane was concealed, Sprague almost savagely muttered to himself: "She's sorry now, I'll bet! Well, let her be sorry for a while. It'll do her good."

But little did he dream in what peril Dolores was and how she bitterly was regretting even at that moment her angry heedlessness of his warning. Had he but known——

CHAPTER XVII.

IN SATO'S SNARE.

WHEN Dolores Perez, head high, eyes staring straight ahead, left Harding's hotel and the man she loved, a Mexican idly sauntered past, sombrero pulled low over his eyes to shield them from the sun's glare. The girl passed him, her heart sore at what she deemed a cool reception from her fiancé. Sprague had not been so glad to see her as he was anxious that she was in danger, Dolores raged in her heart. His danger had brought her to Mexico City wittingly to face it with him. And he had twitted her for being foolhardy and rushing into danger!

She bit her lips to restrain the sudden tears which seemed to sear her eyes. She walked quickly at first, then slackened her pace in a wild hope that Sprague would run after her and ask forgiveness. But Sprague did not follow, or, if he did, he had not seen fit to overtake her, and she was too proud to glance backward to see if he were dogging her steps.

Consequently Dolores did not see the Mexican in the low-drawn sombrero following on her trail. A yearning for solitude came upon her—solitude in which she could give vent to her self-imposed grief. For, on calmer reflec-

tion, Dolores began to accuse herself of having been overhasty, ungenerous, and thankless toward the man who had spoken with thought for her safety only. In this mood she directed her steps toward a quiet, many-bowered square—one of the many abounding in Mexico City and similar to, but less frequented than, Washington Square in New York City. Here she sat on a bench in an arbor and gave way to tears, sobbing hysterically in an aftermath of self-reproach for her hasty temper and unreasoning pride. The first paroxysms over, Dolores began to feel a benumbing influence acting upon her mind. She sought to shake it off. Then, chancing to glance toward a corner of the arbor, her startled eyes beheld behind the screen of leaves the yellow face of a Japanese beneath a Mexican sombrero, his eyes boring deep into hers.

She tried to scream in fright, but found herself deprived of volition as the hypnotic influence of Sato Nagati's black eyes cast their unholy spell upon her to do his will. Even when he emerged from his hiding place and stood before her, Dolores could not move. The Jap made a few passes before her eyes.

"You will stay here five minutes," he said commandingly. "I shall return. You will go off with me. You will enter an auto, which I will drive. You will make no outcry."

She sat unmoved, staring straight ahead with the fixed look of the hypnotized. The Jap turned and walked hurriedly out into the square. Five minutes later he returned and touched the girl's shoulder. Obedient to his will, Dolores rose, guided in her actions by his mesmeric influence. He led her to the curb, assisted her into the closed, curtained tonneau of a touring car, took his place at the wheel, and sped off toward the southwestern section of Mexico City.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DUEL OF SOULS.

ALL unwitting of the new abduction which had placed Dolores again in the power of Sato Nagati, Sprague led Harding and Brady to the wood where, off the southwest road, the airplane of the Jap was concealed. The machine was so cleverly camouflaged and screened under heavily leafed branches that even Harding found it difficult to discover. Sprague and Brady beguiled themselves by permitting him to hunt for the plane. Finally Harding gave up, and the other two men led him to the copse where they had concealed the machine. So skillfully had they screened it that Harding hardly believed it possible a plane was concealed therein, until Sprague pulled away some of the branches and revealed a wing of the aëro.

It was a matter of a few moments to uncover it and lift it clear. The machine was light enough for two men to carry it; for three men it was an easy burden. They carried it to a clearing and began a systematic search of the fuselage and machinery for any papers the Jap might have concealed. But for all their search they found nothing to incriminate Sato until Sprague, by a sudden inspiration, bethought himself of examining the padding beneath the leather surface of the seats.

Acting on the inspiration, he produced a knife and cut a slit in each seat. Inserting his hand in the first cushion, he could find nothing. But the second seat amply rewarded his search. His fingers, fumbling in the padding and among the springs, clasped a packet of papers. With a cry of triumph, he pulled it forth and held it high.

"Eureka!" he cried. "This is why Sato was so anxious about his plane, I'll bet!"

Some of the papers proved to be written in Japanese, but most were in Mexican, which all three men could read.

"Here's evidence of a plot against the United States," commented Sprague, after carefully examining one lot. "And here's a complete roster of the rebel chiefs involved in the move on Mexico City." He began to read off the names, then desisted. "I'll place this evidence before the president," he said. Then, as he examined more closely, he exclaimed: "We'll outwit them now! Here's the full detail of the forces coming against us—so many men to the south, so many to the north, so many to the east, and so many to the west. With this information the administration can distribute its forces to combat the rebels and defeat them. No time is to be lost. Brady, you take the papers relating to the plot against the United States and fly this plane to Nogales. Deliver the papers to the general there, with orders to forward them by plane to Washington. Then hustle back here. Go!"

Brady entered the machine. Enough of a clearing was available for a rise. He started the engine, waving to his comrades. Then, with a graceful swoop, he soared up—up—up—and sped northeast toward Nogales.

Harding and Sprague, the precious papers informing them of the revolutionary movements in their possession, hastened toward the road and walked swiftly into the city.

Higher and higher soared Brady. They saw his machine heading off, but little dreamed that Sato also, just emerging from an adobe hut wherein he had imprisoned Dolores, also saw the precious plane dashing away with its incriminating evidence against his activities in Japan's behalf.

With a snarl of rage Sato concentrated every energy on the task he had set for himself, and projected his as-

tral body directly upward and into the fuselage of Brady's machine. Brady, intent on his task of speeding off, was startled at the yellow apparition which interposed between him and space ahead. The grinning face, malevolent eyes, and spectral hands extended toward him almost unnerved him. But he gritted his teeth, and with a prayer that he might fend this dread visitor he likewise projected his astral body full against Sato's, gripping with spectral arms the equally phantom form of his enemy.

Exactly as in the dances the three Americans had practiced Brady swayed the form of Sato aside, so his vision ahead could not be disturbed, and in this wise, using occult defense against occult attack, he sped on—on—on—until Sato's power of projection became more and more feeble with distance, and finally his astral body disappeared.

Then, nearly exhausted at the double task he had been compelled to perform, Brady withdrew his astral body and descended for a few moments' respite. Refreshed, he soared aloft again and successfully completed his flight to Nogales, delivered the papers, saw them relayed by aëro to Washington, and then refilled his tanks with gasoline for the return trip to Mexico City.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THREAT OF SATO NAGATI.

ARRIVED at the Administration Palace, Harding and Sprague were granted immediate audience with the president. They placed before him the details of Sato's conspiracy and assisted him in plans to circumvent the attack upon the capital by the bandit forces.

Instead of waiting to be attacked, the loyal troops were led against the advancing foes of the administration. With their battles and the day-after-

day drives that followed the successful defeat of Sato's plot, this tale has no connection, save as a sidelight on the ultimate ruse practiced by General Gonzales which led to the death of Zapata and the later campaign, which seems, at this writing, to spell the doom of the revolutionaries in the stricken republic to the south of the United States. Suffice it to say that the victory which would have been the fruition of Sato's plot but for the discovery of his papers in the airplane was turned into utter rout, and that Villa, Blanquet, and the other forces loyal to the memories of Diaz, Madero, and Huerta were driven back into mountain fastnesses, whence they continue their desultory and ineffectual raids, both against the Mexican loyalists and against the American border States.

But before this outcome Sato Nagati tried to forestall defeat of his plans by playing his last trump. When Brady successfully overcame his astral effort to unnerve him Sato turned his attention to the remaining two, Sprague and Harding. He had been amazed to find Brady alive, and the discovery added to his fear of the Americans and their power. Having failed in his mission, and knowing that he could not return to his emperor with failure writ upon his record, Sato decided upon a vengeance befitting a Samurai. This achieved, he would end his worthless life by hara-kiri.

First, however, he must undo, so much as possible, the hurt to his nation by the discovery of those incriminating papers. So Sato sent a telepathic flash to Sprague.

"Restore my papers," he told the American, "and Señorita Dolores goes unharmed. She is in my power. Refuse—and she dies!"

Sprague received the message in a moment when he was not guarding himself from mental intrusion on the part of the Jap. The message alarmed him

at first, and he discussed it with Harding.

"I don't believe it," said Harding. "Let's ask the secretary."

They telephoned the secretary of state, inquiring for Dolores. They were informed that Dolores had not yet returned from a visit she had intended to make to them at Harding's hotel. This news, hours after Dolores had gone, nearly crazed Sprague. "It's true! It's true!" he raved, clutching Harding's shoulder so hard that the other winced. "That fiend has her in his power! He wants his papers—or her life!"

Harding, white-faced with horror, could offer no hope. They knew Sato would not hesitate at the most inhuman cruelties, and in despair they sent telepathic flashes to locate him and reply to his demands. Sato evidently expected this, and had left his mind open to receive their answer to his ultimatum.

"Sprague," said Harding, "I feel Sato's mind receiving my flashes. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him we'll return the papers."

Harding stared in amazement. "Return the papers?" he cried.

"Yes—to-night. Anything to gain time," said Sprague savagely. "Tell him I'm recalling Brady. Sato doesn't know we've split the papers, part for America and part for Mexico. We must fence for time if we're going to save Dolores. Can't you see? If that fiend knows we haven't got the papers he'll kill her without mercy."

Harding nodded. Then he concentrated his mentality to reach Sato, and soon got in touch with him. "We'll return the papers, Sato," he flashed, "if you will tell us where Señorita Dolores is."

Sato's mocking laugh greeted this promise. "Papers first," came his reply. "Girl afterward. And deliver papers right away or she dies."

"But we've got to wait for Brady to return with them," sped Harding's reply. "Sprague is flashing Brady now to come back."

"How long?" came Sato's demand rather doubtfully.

"As long as it has taken him to go, it must take so long to return," answered Harding. "Say four hours from now."

"Where shall we meet?" asked Sato. "And will you pledge my safety?"

"We pledge nothing. It is for you to guard yourself," went the American's reply. "And if Dolores is hurt you shall die!"

Another laugh greeted this sally, a laugh which made Harding's blood run cold. "Pledge my safety," insisted Sato, "and I deliver the girl for the papers."

Harding communed with Sprague. "Promise his safety," said the lover wretchedly.

Harding flashed the pledge to Sato, who replied: "It is well. Meet me four hours hence at the beginning of the southwest road out of Mexico City. The girl shall be near by, ready to be delivered to you. But if you fail to bring the papers and try any treachery she dies."

Knowing it to be impossible for them to deliver the papers, but trusting to Providence to thwart the dastardly plans of the Jap, Harding nevertheless promised, and the telepathic communications ceased.

"We must find Dolores," said Sprague decisively. "When Sato learns we haven't got the papers he'll slay her as sure as my name is Walter Sprague."

"Well, we have four hours' grace," said Harding slowly. "It isn't much, but it's something. Let's flash for her."

"Better still," suggested Sprague, "let's go toward the southwest road and try astral projection of our eyes to see if we can locate her in any of

the houses there or just outside the city."

Accordingly the two men set out on their strange mission, using every iota of their wonderful telepathic and astral power to reach the mind of Dolores Perez. But all their efforts were unavailing. Two hours after their start on this mission they were as far at sea as at the beginning. They now were nearing the southwest road. Here houses were less frequent, and they made more speed in their search. But, seek as they would, they could find no trace of the girl they sought.

"Maybe that devil put us on the wrong track," said Sprague hopelessly. "Maybe he has her at the other end of town, and would bring her here in an auto from there."

"We'll try a little while longer here," said Harding. "We have three-quarters of an hour yet."

"I wonder if Sato knows we're here?"

"Hardly, unless he has seen us. I've kept my mind a blank to him, although I've felt his mental probing."

"So have I," said Sprague, "but I made him think I was flashing Brady to return."

They hurried along, searching with astral vision every house along the road. Finally they came to a stretch where no houses were in sight. Staring down the road, Sprague shook his head with a hopeless look in his eyes.

"No use," he said dolorously. "We might as well turn back, Harding."

They faced about and retraced their steps, both weary and heart-hungry, full of the despair of the defeated. Sato held the whiphand, and they must bare themselves to his lashing. Dolores' fate seemed sealed, unless by some means they could lay hands on the yellow man who held her in his power.

Fifteen minutes were left them of the precious four hours' grace, fifteen

minutes that raced all too quickly into the eternity of things past. Sprague held his watch in a feverishly nervous hand, watching the second hand telling off the spaces on its dial. With each tick his heart seemed more leaden, his brain more benumbed under the weight of impending loss and sorrow. Harding was walking gloomily along, head down, but mind active.

Ten minutes—left—and still no hope! Five minutes—four—three! They were nearing the rendezvous appointed by Sato. Would he keep the appointment, or was he aware of its futility for himself? The Americans asked themselves this question a hundred times as they drew nearer and nearer the meeting place.

Sato was not in sight. Sprague and Harding began to yield to despair. Then, when their hopes seemed doomed entirely, an auto appeared speeding toward them from the city part of the thoroughfare they were plodding.

And at the wheel sat—not Sato, but Dolores Perez!

CHAPTER XX.

SATO'S RUSE.

WITH a glad cry of relief and love and happiness all combined in one Sprague sprang directly in the auto's path as Dolores shut off gas and applied brakes. Harding stared in amazement at this sudden apparition of the girl for whom they had made such an unavailing search. But he, too, was immensely relieved, and hastened to express his delight.

Sprague went to the side of the machine and held out his arms, hoping she would yield to his embrace. But she merely stared at him with unseeing eyes and repeated words which seemed to have been dictated to her.

"Give me the papers," came her voice, sounding strangely hollow. "Sato waits for me. I must go. The papers?"

"Dolores, listen!" exclaimed Sprague. "Don't you know me? Won't you forgive me for hurting you?"

But the girl seemed to stare at him and yet beyond him, as though she did not see him. "The papers," she murmured again. "I must return with them. My master waits."

"Well, I'll be—shot!" exclaimed Harding. "Hypnotized!"

"The devil!" cried Sprague, suddenly realizing the ingenious stratagem played by Sato. "But his ruse won't work! We'll save her from him. He can't stop us!"

"Señorita Dolores," said Harding, "do you know us?"

The girl did not seem to hear, continuing to stare straight ahead, unblinking.

"What can we do?" whispered Harding.

"Take the wheel from her and drive home," suggested Sprague. But Harding frowned on this. "Maybe Sato can kill her, holding her in his power by hypnotism," he objected. "We'll have to use some other means."

Sprague saw the justice of Harding's stand. Sato's power was not a matter to deal with lightly. Probably he was not far off, watching this tableau in the road and enjoying his enemies' discomfiture. They knew they could not break the hypnotic spell of another person, that it required the one who hypnotized to release the one in thrall. This release must be either voluntary or brought about by the death of the mesmerist.

"The papers?" came the girl's sing-song voice. "Where are they?"

Harding glanced at Sprague. It hardly would do to voice the fact to her, lest it be repeated through her to Sato's listening brain that the papers were beyond their recovery. They must play for time, for opportunity, do anything but let her know and so inform Sato.

Sprague was about to reply when Harding made a sudden spring upon the dashboard of the machine and clasped the form of Dolores tightly in his arms.

The girl's lips drew back from her teeth in a rage. Sprague thought Harding suddenly had gone mad, and was about to force him to unhand Dolores, when Harding hissed: "Let go, Sprague! Help me!"

And then, in a flash, Sprague understood. The one he had thought Dolores was not Dolores, but the arch-fiend Sato himself, come thus attired and disguised to befool them into a new trap.

CHAPTER XXI.

TURNING THE TABLES.

HARDING'S movement had been so sudden that he had caught Sato unawares, yet he had found no mean adversary. This was no woman, but a man, a powerful athlete, a person of steel sinews and lion strength. He gripped his arms together until it seemed he must break Sato's ribs, and thus hauled him from the seat and to the road. "Handcuff his wrists and ankles both!" panted Harding. He felt the hot breath of the pseudo Dolores against his cheek, then gave a snort of pain and fury as the Jap bit deep into the flesh. But he held on like grim death, standing in the road. Sprague saw Harding's bleeding cheek, and a sudden, vindictive rage consumed him. But wish though he might to slay this man in their power, his one desire was to take him alive. So he restrained his fury and withheld the smashing blow he had intended to give the Jap. Instead, he stooped to lock the prisoner's ankles in handcuffs. Even as he stooped, the Jap kicked backward viciously, landing a heel on Sprague's nose, so that blood spurted from it. Sprague reeled backward, but rallied, and by a quick tackle wound a sturdy

arm around the calves of Sato Nagati. With his free hand he snapped irons on the Jap's ankles. It was done in the twinkling of an eye—far less time than it has taken to recount it. And Sato's shoes—those of a man—explained how Harding had discovered the Jap's nearly successful ruse.

Sato was horrible to see. Never before had Harding or Sprague seen such a look on the face of a man. His beady eyes were bulging, lips livid, pared back from teeth tightly clenched in rage and despair.

Grasping one of the Jap's arms, which Harding held tightly to Sato's side, Sprague manacled it and swung it behind the Jap. Then, Harding still holding the slender but wiry form in his viselike grasp, Sprague yanked the Jap's other arm backward and fastened the second wrist with the links of justice.

Sato had ceased to struggle, and on his face had appeared a look of sullen acceptance of his fate. Yet the gleam in his eyes was murderous as he stared at his captors. They felt the power of his mind upon theirs, and knew he was trying at close range to murder them by sheer mental concentration. They shielded themselves from this venomous attack, however, by their mystic thought circle, a nimbus, as it were, of imagined space, distance, voids, depths, so that it could not penetrate to their consciousness.

They lifted Sato into the machine. Even as they did so the woman's hat and wig he had donned fell from Sato's head, disclosing the short, crisp, black hair of his race. Sprague sprang into the tonneau to stand guard, and Harding took the wheel. In this wise they entered the city, Sprague carefully drawing the curtains so that no one might discover the prisoner.

Although Sprague plied Sato with questions, the Jap answered never a word. The American's face was

smeared with blood from his nose, but he let it drip on his clothing, unheeding, lest by distraction in wiping it away Sato might be able to turn some physical or occult trick against him or Harding. Harding, likewise bleeding from the bite in his cheek, gave the blood no heed. They traveled swiftly, and arrived at the headquarters of the department of justice. Here they alighted and carried Sato into the building.

"Whatever you do," cautioned Sprague to the police official in charge, "don't loose his bonds. Rather, bind him in ropes, so he can't get free. Then put a special guard over him while we report to the president."

"What is the charge?" asked the official.

"Murder in the first degree upon the bodies of the Council of Nine," said Sprague. "Attempted murder of myself. Abduction of the Señorita Dolores Perez, niece of the secretary of state. Plots against the Mexican government to unite the bandits into a joint attack on Mexico City and obtain for Japan a land cession in Lower California and Sonora. You can see the need for extreme care in holding the prisoner. He is too dangerous even in handcuffs. Keep four men on constant watch, and under no circumstances permit them to come under Sato's glance for fear of hypnotism. Keep four other men handy in case of emergency. For further precaution you might place him in a strait-jacket—I understand you have them here as well as we have them in America—and place a lock on it so no one can release him. Keep the key yourself."

"The señores had a hard time to overcome him," said the official, glancing at their bloodstained faces, their stained clothing.

"Somewhat," grinned Harding. "But he'll bite no more!"

"Or kick," growled Sprague.

"Probably the señores need a doctor,"

suggested the official. "One is always at hand here." He tapped a bell. A gendarme appeared. "Call Doctor Mendoz!" he commanded.

A few moments later Doctor Mendoz appeared. He knew Harding and Sprague, and bowed. After examining Sprague's nose he declared it had been broken by Sato's kick. "You'll be all right in a few weeks, though, señor," he said, setting himself skillfully to the task of splinting Sprague's proboscis. "Tried to stop an auto, it almost seems," he smiled.

"No, a 'lady's' slipper," said Sprague facetiously, glancing at the Jap's female costume and man's shoes. The doctor grinned. "Then the wound has been 'heeled,'" he punned, "and there's no need for my services, eh?"

But Sprague was so dumfounded by this wit in a Mexican that he effectually was squelched. Doctor Mendoz dressed Harding's wound and received that person's grateful thanks for easing his pain. Thus bandaged, Harding and Sprague went forth to notify the president of their catch. This done, and the president giving even stricter orders for Sato's confinement, the Americans went to their respective rooms to change their bloody garments for others before starting on the trail to find Dolores.

In Sato's papers had been found a diary which a Mexican who could converse in and translate Japanese had deciphered. In it was set forth, in carefully couched words, Sato's exploits in Mexico. The record was addressed to "His Imperial Majesty, the Mikado of Japan," and expressed a hope that "his heart would be gladdened to learn how successfully his servant Sato—unworthy of even the slightest reflex of the glory of his emperor's glance—had won for the Land of the Rising Sun secrets of mighty power wherewith to punish those Mexicans who would thwart Japan in acquiring Mexican

lands and those Americans who denied racial equality to Japanese subjects." It set forth how Sato had set the tiny bomb of powdered poison in the bouquet on the table in the room of the Council of Nine and had exploded it when he learned they had refused to sign the land cession; how he had fought the three American secret-service men who were on his trail; how he had plotted with the banditti to overwhelm the administration and win from the victors the cession denied by the powers in control of Mexico; how he had caused the death of Senator Taguerrez by his power to mentally paralyze his victim, and other details. The diary ended with the prayer that "Your majesty will not be provoked at what little failures I have experienced, comparing them with successes achieved, and greater successes will follow when the three Americans meet their doom through me."

The papers established a complete case for the government. But the strictest censorship was cast about them, and this memoir is the first inkling of the thwarting of a revolution which threatened not alone Mexico but the entire American continent. But the papers could not be restrained from publishing next day news of the death of Sato Nagati in his cell. He had committed suicide by strangling himself against the collar of his strait-jacket. Harding and Sprague could visualize the stoic indifference with which the Samurai had exercised his iron will in thus ending a life no longer useful to Japan and therefore no longer useful to himself.

Brady's return had been delayed by motor trouble, but he arrived before noon, and the three men joined forces to seek Dolores. Sprague and Harding had been at the task all night, and were haggard from loss of sleep and anxiety. But their joy at ending the menace of Sato's influence was un-

bounded, and Brady joined them in their jubilation. He told how he had been menaced by Sato's astral form and how he had overcome it.

"Nearly unnerved me, though, when I saw his eyes glaring at me up in the clouds," he said.

"Well, he's dead now," said Sprague. "And here's an item in the paper may interest you, Brady." He handed Brady the Mexican paper, in which a cabled communication from the Japanese government made a complete disavowal of the actions of Sato and disclaimed any responsibility on the part of the mikado or the Land of the Rising Sun for Sato's conspiracy.

"All the same, I'll bet he was one of a band pledged to do service for their country, even at the expense of their lives, but without open, official sanction from their government," said Brady. "I'll bet that if he had gotten away with this game he would have been richly rewarded for it."

"The papers we found show Sato was none other than Yamati Yotori, of the ancient Samurai family of Shan Otoy, and that he was one of the most eminent Japanese psychologists ever known. We certainly were lucky to bring about his destruction," said Sprague.

"There's America's real peril," said Harding, "the occult powers possessed by the Japanese. And their methods," he added vindictively as he smoothed his cheek with a grimace of pain.

"And now, boys," said Sprague, rising, "we must find Dolores before it is too late."

"Too late?" echoed the others.

"Yes; she might be starving to death while we sit and talk, doing nothing."

"There's only one way," said Harding, "or we'll be too late."

"And that——" questioned Sprague.

"Comb the city, as we did hunting for Sato—each take a section and work

our telepathic powers in the same criss-cross manner."

CHAPTER XXII.

LOVE'S REWARD.

THIS course decided on, the trio went about their task with feverish energy. No time was to be lost if they were to rescue Dolores before she starved to death. Sato's death had freed her from hypnotic influence, and she could respond to their telepathic questioning force should they encounter her mind waves. Sprague took the eastern end of the city, Harding the western, and Brady the northern. They converged exactly as they had in the case of Sato. But so far their mentalities had not located Dolores.

"Can it be possible Sato took her out of the city?" groaned Sprague as the three met.

"We haven't combed the southern section yet," comforted Harding, his heart going out to his chief, whose face, behind the bandages, was pallid, eyes gloomy with foreboding.

"Let's hurry," added Brady.

So they set off again, each at a point where his mental forces would coöperate with the other two in the weird search. But Dolores apparently was not in the city, or, if she were, she must be beyond their powers. "Dead," groaned Sprague in his heart.

"We can try the southwest road again," quoth Harding.

"Useless," said Sprague, but hoping against hope nevertheless.

"Why useless?" asked Brady. "She was under hypnotic influence when you tried before. Now, you know, Sprague, even our powers cannot reach one in hypnotic state. Let's try—just to make sure."

"She may respond now," said Harding. "Being free from mesmerism, she will respond."

And so they started again, little hope

in their hearts, however, to find Dolores. It was Sprague whose mind first came into contact with hers. Wildly happy, he flashed the gladsome news to Harding and Brady, and the trio gathered together.

"She's in that hut—there—just off the road," said Sprague excitedly, pointing to a hut scarce discernible now in the dusk which had fallen. "I got just the faintest response, but was able to locate her."

The men strode toward the hut. But Brady offered a word of caution. "You know what Sato was," he said. "Suppose he's left a trap here for us to tread into."

"Right," said Sprague. "We'll investigate, or, rather, I shall."

He stood in an attitude tense with anxiety as he projected his astral eyes toward the hut, searching the ground for evidences of some mine which might be exploded by an unwary step. Then he sent his vision into the cabin. What he saw started him on a run toward the place, heedless of pitfalls, eager only to be in time. As he ran, his hand went to his hip.

Harding and Brady hurried after him, just in time to see Sprague hurtle his body against the door of the hut and vanish in its interior.

Then came the crash of a shot, a woman's scream, and—silence.

Rushing through the door, Harding and Brady saw a strange tableau. Sprague was holding Dolores in his arms, tenderly kissing her right wrist, from which blood was flowing freely. The girl was unconscious, the light was barely sufficient for them to grasp these details as Sprague turned toward them.

"Brady," came his voice strangely weak, "hurry for an auto. I had to shoot her!"

"Shoot her?" cried both men in amazement.

"Yes, tell you later; hurry for the auto," said Sprague, then fell, uncon-

scious, overwrought by this strange ending to the chase and his exhaustion in pursuing it to its close.

Harding it was whose arms received the collapsing form of his chief, easing it to the ground, where, still holding Dolores in embrace, Sprague lay for many minutes, while Brady sped off to get a vehicle.

Sprague yielded to Harding's ministrations, however, in the end, and opened his eyes.

"Dolores," he murmured, "I didn't mean to hurt you—but I had to do it." Then, as he recognized Harding, Sprague sat up, tenderly removing his arm from beneath Dolores. "A close call, Harding," he said. "I was 'all in' afterward."

"Guess you were, Sprague," said Harding. "You went out like a candle."

"Loss of sleep—excitement—and the tragedy of having to shoot her," muttered Sprague. "Heavens, Harding, but it was awful! If I had been a moment later——"

"What?" asked the other.

"Dolores would have been dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yes. That fiend, Sato, had left in this hut a vial like the one he left me when he had me in his dungeon," explained Sprague. "When I projected my astral eyes inside this room I saw Dolores, emaciated with hunger—as you see her—raising the vial to her lips to drink, probably inspired by some posthumous influence of Sato's mind——"

He shuddered, and Harding interposed: "The devil!"

"Yes," said Sprague, "he was a devil, if ever one existed in human form! That vial held death! I couldn't reach her side in time to knock it from her hand, so I took the only course to save her."

Harding nodded, understanding the dread that must have filled Sprague's

heart as he leveled his weapon at the woman he loved and shot her lest she die of poison.

"I shot her," said Sprague sadly, "and I'd rather have put a bullet in my heart than do it. But there was no other way."

He lifted Dolores' wrist to his lips, kissing the wound and heedless of the blood that left its crimson traces on his face. The girl stirred.

Outside sounded the *chug-chug* of Brady's auto speeding toward them on the road. Harding went to the door and halloed. Brady's auto lights flashed in his direction.

Some of its radiant glare fell upon the two within the hut. Dolores opened her eyes. Above her was the bandaged face of her lover. He was kissing her wrist. But it seemed that his kisses burned—pained her. Then she swooned again, as Sprague, exerting his strength to the utmost, what was left of it after all his toil and sleepless anxiety, lifted her in his arms and staggered to the threshold.

Brady came forward from the road, a black figure in the bright glare of the headlights. "I've brought some brandy, Sprague, and you'd better take some." He offered the flask to his chief. But Sprague would not relinquish this opportunity to hold in his arms the woman he loved. Harding took the flask and held it to Sprague's lips. But Sprague growled savagely: "Dolores first!" Then, thinking of her wound and its danger of infection, he directed Harding to lave it with the brandy.

Harding soaked a handkerchief with the fiery liquor and applied it to the injured wrist of the girl. With another handkerchief he wiped the blood from Sprague's face. The sting of the brandy on her raw wound roused Dolores to wakefulness, and with wakefulness came also the agony of her hurt, so that she groaned.

"Dolores," Sprague pleaded brokenly, "can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive?" she murmured. "For what?"

"For shooting you," he moaned.

"Is that what pains me?" she asked.

"Yes, I had to do it——"

"I know, Walter," she murmured.

"And you're not angry?"

"Angry? I think it was the bravest thing in the world—to shoot at one you loved—to save her life! I was goaded to take the poison, Walter—goaded by the mind of Sato." Even mention of his name made her shiver.

"I knew the flask was like the one he left me in my dungeon when I was in his power," said Sprague. "But that's a long story, and I shall have to tell you of it later."

"Where is Sato now?" she asked.

"Dead. He will trouble you no more."

Dolores shuddered. "And to think, Walter, that I—I—almost hated you for warning me against him," she said chokingly.

"I knew he was dangerous," said Sprague.

"It seemed to me that you didn't want me to share your danger—as though I were in your way or that I wasn't wanted—as though——"

"But you know better now, Dolores!" he exclaimed earnestly.

"Yes——"

"And that I feared for your safety?"

Harding and Brady were moving away. This communion of lovers was not for their ears.

Sprague repeated his question when Dolores did not reply.

"But I also feared for your safety!" she exclaimed. "And it seemed so cool of you to disregard the—the——"

"The what, Dolores?"

"The love that prompted me to share danger with you," she murmured against his shoulder. "We of Spanish blood are more demonstrative, though, I guess."

Sprague felt the warm blood tingling in his cheeks. Was he a cool lover? he asked himself miserably. What could he say to please her? He was no gallant of olden days, but a prosaic, matter-of-fact, decent American lover, yet he would have given worlds for the smooth suavity of an accomplished squire of dames. As it was, he said—nothing. But his embrace grew tighter than was necessary for the mere holding of her in his arms, and from somewhere against his coat came a dulcet murmur: "Walter?"

"Yes, Dolores?" murmured Sprague, ear inclined to her lips.

"Do you—can you—love me—after—after all the hurt I did to you?" came the girl's whisper, tremulous as a zephyr's plea for the kiss of a flower.

Sprague glanced toward his companions in this adventure. They were stepping into the machine, but the glare of its headlights was full in his eyes. The girl in his arms quivered—or was he the one who was quivering with the wonderful ecstasy of this witching hour? It seemed an æon that he paused thus, although in actual time it was the fraction of a second, the flicker of an eyelash.

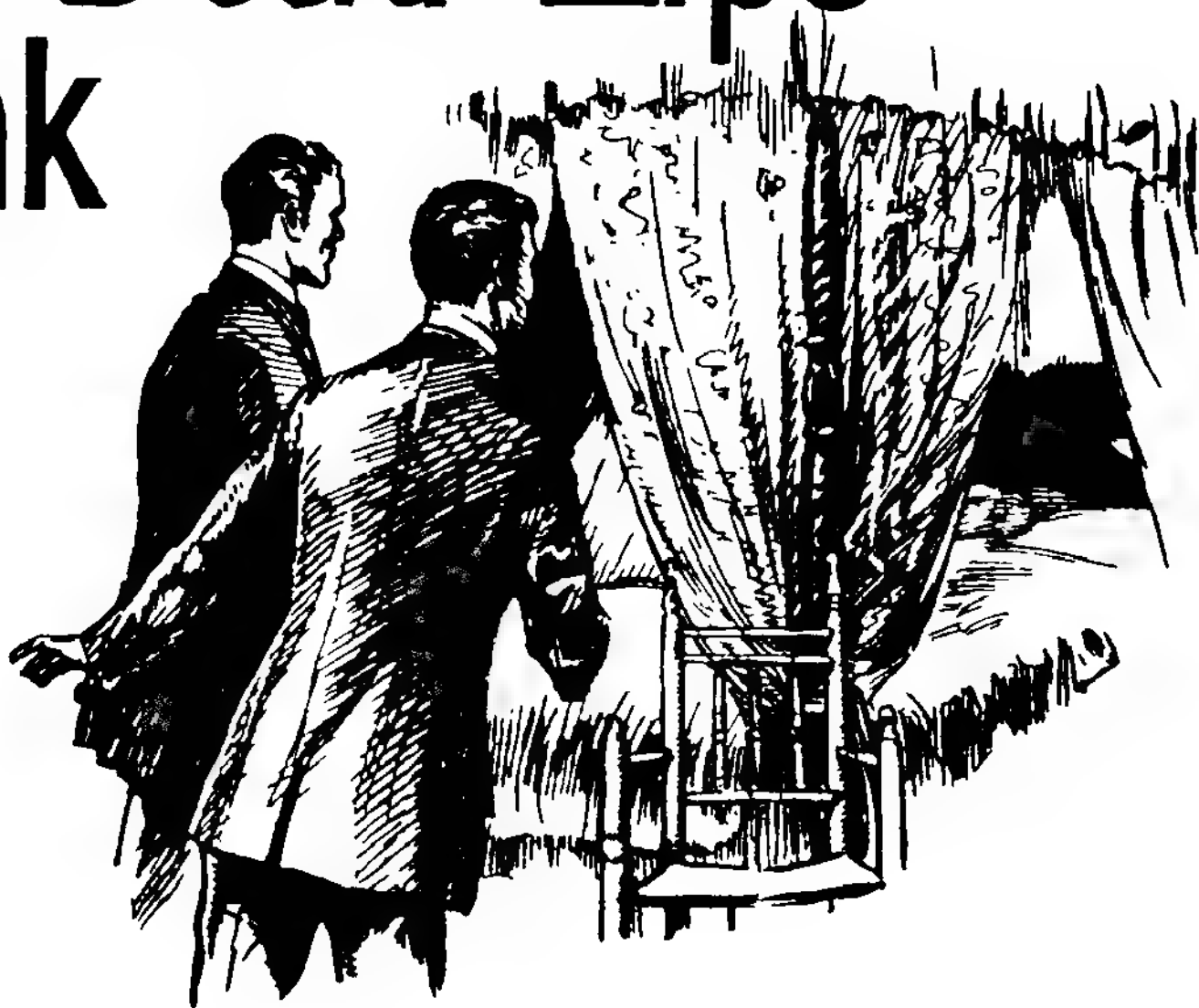
And then, conspicuous though they might be in the auto headlights' glare, Sprague tossed aside all thought of conventionalities, and, eyes shining with the joy of love's fulfillment, he gave answer to Dolores' question, lip to lip, in the language that needs no words and is most eloquent in its silence.



When Dead Lips Speak

By

Anna
Alice
Chapin



THE young man who had been waiting with constant, nervous glances at the door sprang up with relieved alacrity to answer the bell. He was a fair, sensitive-looking youth, not more than twenty-three or four, and hardly looking his age. He was carefully, even a trifle foppishly dressed, with a fresh band of black on the sleeve of his gray coat.

"Awfully good of you to come!" he said, uttering the meaningless formality in a pleasant but rather characterless voice. "Queer sort of arrangement."

"Very!" tersely agreed the man he had just greeted, entering and removing his shabby hat and coat. He was a marked contrast to his host, being close to forty, unusually dark of skin and hair, with a heavily lined, stern face and curiously light-colored eyes which he kept half closed. He did not look amiable, and the young man who had admitted him seemed to shrink from his grim and unresponsive demeanor.

"I suppose," said the older man, "that our letters are, in effect, about the same. We might compare them, though."

He took an envelope from his pocket, and after a moment of nervous hesitation the young fellow did the same. They first compared the envelopes, which were both addressed in the same old-fashioned, spidery handwriting—one to "Cyril Norton," the other to "Ashton Ware."

"Your uncle was such an up-to-date man," said Ashton Ware, the visitor, "that his writing always surprised me. It is of the old school."

"But surely he was of the old school!" exclaimed Cyril. "I never saw him without imagining what he would look like in the clothes of another day and generation!"

"He? Of the old school?" Ashton Ware laughed harshly. "My dear Mr. Norton, get that idea out of your head! His was the most modern, progressive personality I have known in years. He

led the extremists when it came to daring theories and problems—scientific or metaphysical, or—as is so often the case—both. Surely you never thought of your late uncle as old-fashioned?”

“I—I never thought of him in any other way particularly,” said Cyril, looking perplexed. “He never did anything particularly modern that I know of except buy an automobile and a phonograph. He *was* fond of the phonograph. Always kept it in his bedroom.” Ware smiled a grim, mirthless smile.

“And you never heard of his research and experimental work in psychology?”

“Psychology? Uncle Adam? Impossible!”

Cyril appeared to grow slightly paler, and drew back a step.

“It seems incredible!” he exclaimed in his colorless voice. “My uncle always seemed a quiet, rather moody old man given over to his love for books. I didn’t know that he had any interest in life keener than what he felt for a genuine first edition.”

There was the faintest note of bitterness in his voice, and Ashton Ware flashed him a quick glance out of those odd, penetrating light eyes of his.

“You and the late Mr. Adam Norton—your uncle—were not altogether congenial, I believe?”

Cyril colored as he answered hastily: “Malicious persons have circulated that rumor——”

“But doesn’t it happen to be a true rumor?” persisted the other, seeming to take a malignant satisfaction in the young man’s obvious annoyance and embarrassment. “You wanted to be an actor, I think?”

Cyril Norton shrugged his shoulders. “We got along together as well as most uncles and nephews, I fancy,” he said, speaking as composedly and naturally

as he could. He did not care about the stage, and—well, it couldn’t be expected that we should have the same tastes with a difference of half a century between us, but we seldom quarreled.”

“And yet,” said Ashton Ware, tapping the letter he held, “he expected you to murder him!”

“He seemed to think it quite as likely that you would!” responded Cyril quickly with a certain veiled intonation that suggested he didn’t think that proposition altogether improbable himself. Ware could hardly fail to read the significance of the tone, and a flicker of resentment showed in his pale eyes for a moment, then passed under what was evidently a superbly developed power of self-control.

“You have a comfortable place here,” he said abruptly, looking about him at the rich heavy furniture and old oil paintings. The Nortons lived in one of the largest apartments in the city, and, though the house was modern, the flat itself was as like a piece taken whole out of an older and less garish day as any flat could be. But Cyril was staring at the two envelopes and did not answer, so the older man said bluntly, almost brutally:

“Let’s get done with it! Read yours first aloud—or, stay, we will read each other’s aloud.”

Cyril agreed, they exchanged envelopes, and Ware read from the letter addressed to the young man:

“MY DEAR CYRIL: I have reason to believe that Ashton Ware will try to murder me. If I should die suddenly, I wish you to summon him here and place him under any and all tests in your power. Remember, you will also have to prove that you yourself did not commit the crime, as you have both incentive and opportunity. Above all, I wish you both to submit to the test of the Vocamorta, the directions for using which are appended below. Your uncle,

“ADAM NORTON.”

Cyril looked at him blankly. “The

Vocamorta!" he repeated. "What did he mean?"

"One of his inventions, doubtless," said Ware. "During the far too brief period when I went to school I think I learned that *Voca* meant voice and *Morta* death. Therefore, this means literally the voice of death, or voice of the dead. Am I right about that? Your uncle sent you through college, I believe, and you should know."

Cyril recoiled, and spoke with a visible effort: "Yes—yes, of course. *Vocamorta*—the voice of the dead! What a horrible thought! Shall I read aloud his letter to you? It is practically the same as mine, only a good deal longer and more detailed.

"MY DEAR WARE: I believe my grand-nephew may wish to kill me, and do not think it entirely improbable that you may do the same. If you hear of my sudden death, come at once to my residence, and there confront Cyril. You will find, by my will, that each of you will have the strongest possible inducement to cast suspicion on the other. I have invented a wonderful and delicate instrument, the *Vocamorta*, which I believe will testify truthfully to my murderer's identity. I have long believed, in common with many eminent spiritists, that the soul, after leaving the body, especially abruptly or violently, lingers close to its late mortal casing. It has been photographed; it will some day be really seen. There is no reason why it should not be heard. It merely requires some delicate medium, adjusted like, let us say, the nerves of the spirit, to bridge the brief chasm and permit the dead to speak—at least for a little while. Such an instrument I have, I believe, perfected, and if it should be tested successfully over my dead lips I shall not have died in vain.

"ADAM NORTON."

Cyril had read the last part of the letter with a frown of increasing bewilderment. But he seemed to brush it aside with a little, characteristic, half-affected gesture he had, and added: "There are some directions below, like the other. It all seems quite mad to me!"

Ashton Ware shrugged his shoulders. "When did your uncle die, Mr. Nor-

ton?" he brusquely demanded as if tired of wasting time.

"As I told you over the telephone," said young Norton, "I went into his room not five hours ago—that is, about four this afternoon—to find him cold and lifeless. I sent for the doctor immediately, and heard my fears only too sadly confirmed. Then, as Judson, his old valet, gave me his letter, I telephoned you without delay."

The caller smiled bitterly. He and Judson had had more than one interview, and he did not like him. Indeed, he detested that type of old, senile family servant, slavishly devoted to their masters' interests, regarding all strangers askance! Even as he thought thus resentfully a timid knock sounded on one of the inner doors of the apartment, and Judson himself stood before them—a little, bent old man with a scanty fringe of white hair and the perennially anxious yet self-effacing look of one to whom life has been all and only service.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Cyril," he said in a thin voice, "but you said I was to be a witness or something. Me and the maids, sir."

"Quite so, Judson," Cyril Norton answered kindly. "I particularly want you to be present when I open my uncle's will, which his lawyer sent to me, sealed, an hour ago."

"I know all about the will, sir," Judson said in his melancholy, diffident way. "I witnessed it—me and cook."

"Really!" Cyril knitted his brows. "That's odd, isn't it?" He appealed to Ware. "Beneficiaries can't witness wills, yet I'd have sworn Uncle Adam had made some provision for Judson here."

"Oh, sir——" deprecated Judson.

Ware broke in harshly: "Men confronted with death are often apt to forget the smaller considerations of life, and to remember only one great obligation—or one great revenge——" He

broke off, oddly disconcerted, for Cyril was looking at him with a more inscrutable expression than he would have expected in that shallow and transparent young person.

"You are taking it for granted," the latter said quietly, "that Uncle Adam really knew he was confronted by death?"

"His letter sounds like it, doesn't it?" responded Ware with an insolent inflection.

Judson put in his piping voice, not exactly eagerly, but as though impelled by something utterly irrepressible. "And there was his heart, too, you know, Mr. Cyril! You know as well as I, sir, that the doctor told him a year ago he might go off at any moment, and must on no account get excited——"

"That will do!" said Cyril quickly with a heightened color. "Call in the maids and we will read the will at once."

They were just outside the door, the stout cook and the two maids, and were inside it in a second, very much awed and enormously interested.

Then Cyril broke the seal of the long legal envelope and read the document it contained.

The will, which was as brief as legal formality would permit, left his worldly goods to be divided equally between Cyril Norton and Ashton Ware.

Cyril cried out, astounded, as he glanced over it; then, steadying his voice, read it aloud to murmurs of surprise from the servants. Just at the end he came upon a clause in which old Mr. Norton stipulated that "if suspicion of a criminal character were in any manner thrown upon either of the legatees, the other was to inherit the whole fortune outright."

Ashton Ware smiled cynically. He knew a lot about that will. What a weak, spineless fool the boy was anyhow! The plan would be sure to work

with him; he seemed almost like a woman, ready for hysterics and any sort of absurdity.

"Well," said the young man, steadying his voice, "the first thing to do of course is to follow those very strange directions of my uncle's. I—I simply can't understand them. I think he must have been not quite right in his head. I knew he had a laboratory, but really I hardly knew of his going into it for years. Did you, Judson?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said the old fellow, promptly but mournfully. "He used to work there at night with wires and batteries and things——"

"And did you ever know of this—this Vocamorta?" exclaimed Cyril.

"I know there was such a thing, sir. Yes, the Vockymotta; that's what it was. He said the dead could speak through it, but I never heard it working, Mr. Cyril."

The young man shuddered. "God forbid!" he muttered. "What a ghastly invention—even in theory! For, of course, it is entirely impossible."

"Why?" suddenly and rather unexpectedly demanded Ashton Ware. "There has been spirit photography very difficult indeed to explain."

"You believe in this—Vocamorta?" ejaculated Cyril incredulously.

Ware again shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe in giving it a trial—in the presence of these witnesses," was all he said.

"I believe in carrying out my great-uncle's wishes to the letter," Cyril Norton rejoined rather curtly. "Come with me to my uncle's room, if you please—all of you."

He entered first, and paused a moment on the threshold, his head bowed reverently. Old Judson wiped his eyes on his respectable black sleeve, and one of the maids shivered.

"Please come in," said young Norton quietly. "All of you," he repeated.

The bedroom was a fairly large one

for an apartment, and furnished in the somewhat heavy, somber taste of an old-fashioned old man. There were two incongruous notes, one the phonograph, modern and shining and cold of look in a corner, the other the glimpse, through another open door, of a small laboratory.

"You have been here before?" Cyril asked Ware. "I have not seen you."

"Often," he replied laconically. "While you were off with your actor friends!"

Ashton Ware and Judson entered the death chamber, but the three women stayed by the door. Not that they minded a corpse, you understand, but all this talk of the dead speaking, which they had heard through the library door, had made them more than a little uneasy. They huddled together, ready for flight, but determined to stay.

The figure on the bed lay very straight and stiff, covered, face and all, with a sheet.

"The directions," said Ashton Ware, speaking in his naturally unpleasant voice, with no pretense at lowering it, "are to bring in the Vocamorta from the laboratory and place it in position, its electric battery turned on, the small silver disk hanging half an inch above the lips of—of——"

Even he faltered a bit just there. Cyril winced outright.

"Shall—shall I bring it, Mr. Cyril?" asked Judson in a small and nervous voice.

"You know which it is?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I—I'm sort of afraid of it, sir, begging your pardon."

He really was afraid, poor little old man! Like many very gentle, diffident, subservient souls, Judson was at heart far from being a coward. But he had a deep and abiding fear of the Vocamorta. His dread of it amounted almost to an obsession.

Nevertheless, he carried the instrument, a delicately complicated mech-

anism, with two long wires supporting a tiny gleaming circle of metal which hung like a miniature silver lily pad and trembled at the slightest touch.

Very gently Cyril turned the edge of the sheet back from the still face. It was fragile and finely cut, crowned with hair like snow. It looked peaceful, as though Adam Norton were indeed not dead but sleeping.

Cyril consulted his own letter.

"Our directions seem to be the same," he said in a low, grave tone. "The disk——" He lowered the wires so that the little circle of silver gleamed above the pale face. "And now—the electric lights out for—somebody count, please, I—I'm too nervous—for two minutes."

Old Judson, still a little shaky, pulled himself together. "I'll count, sir," he said. "It's the last thing I can do for my old master."

Ware turned the electric switch which flung the room into complete darkness, and immediately Cyril turned on the small battery beside the death-bed and the air was full of the whine and whir of imprisoned electricity trying to break free. The women murmured "Hail Marys" and were more than ever inclined to flee when a tiny blue gleam, the merest pinpoint of light, appeared playing about the disk, a delicate, mysterious spirit thing, dancing almost on the very face of death.

Judson was counting slowly and regularly, though in a very weak and tremulous voice. The room was in utter darkness, save for that pricking, glinting speck of light. But there were sounds. Sounds other than that of the tiny dynamo—strange, scarcely audible sounds—footfalls, and then a queer, harsh voice—the voice of Adam Norton, who lay dead—crying, "Cyril!"

Almost immediately it stopped, and then it came again, and now they could actually see the pale lips, just lighted by the blue flame, moving as Adam

Norton unmistakably said: "Cyril—this man, this Ware—is a blackmailer—a scoundrel——"

Ware uttered a hoarse cry and checked it. Judson had reached ninety-eight in his counting. The voice went on: "You have murdered me, finally——"

"One hundred and seven," said Judson, with chattering teeth. One of the girls began to cry.

"The ginger—you poisoned—I—— Oh, Heaven help me—my heart—I am dying! I can't go on—I——"

The voice broke off, and Cyril quickly turned up the lights as Judson reached the hundred and twenty that made up the two minutes specified in the dead man's directions. Then he disconnected the battery.

The room was intolerably still. Judson wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. Cyril carefully covered the still face, removing the electric apparatus to make room for the sheet, then he turned to the man the voice of the dead had accused.

"Well?" he asked simply.

Ware suddenly gasped wildly, and flung out his hands in a queer, convulsive way, like a man drowning or suffocating.

"That was not the record!" were the words he uttered, in a sort of hoarse, almost voiceless scream. "That was not the rec——" The strident, tortured tones died away. He stood staring, a man of stone yet somehow giving the impression of overwhelming horror.

"Not the record you put in the phonograph?" said Cyril coolly. "I'm quite aware of it. I turned off your record as soon as you started it. It wasn't a bad scheme, though, Ware, especially after you had given him the poisoned Chinese ginger which you knew he was fond of. I had no way of proving I hadn't bought it for him myself—I often did. And with your phono-

graph record smuggled into the machine while the lights were down—while that wouldn't have much actual legal value—well, witnesses and all, it would have put me in a pretty pickle. I congratulate you on your imagination!"

He looked surprisingly energetic and capable all at once. The other man cursed himself for having so underrated his adversary. He was still very cold from shock and terror.

"Then you got him to make a record for you, too!" he said in an ugly voice. "I might have known he'd double cross me at the last. It would have been his idea of a joke!"

"Quite so—a screaming jest! Almost as funny as your giving him the ginger."

"You can't prove there was anything wrong with the ginger!"

"Really? Oh, I think so, you know—I really think so. You are counting—— Don't go, any of you!" he added to the servants who, divided between terror and curiosity, were now edging away. "There'll be more for you to testify to." He went to a carved old-fashioned cabinet, and took down a blue jar of Canton ginger from its shelves. "You are counting," he proceeded calmly, "on his having eaten the few pieces of ginger at the top of the jar. Naturally you would not have poisoned it all, in case of an investigation. He would have been supposed to have died of heart trouble. Entirely simple."

"Then how——"

"As you see," Cyril went on calmly, "the jar has not even been unsealed. I intend to have it analyzed to-morrow."

Ware, his face ashen and convulsed, started toward him, but the effeminate-looking man with the black band on his sleeve had already exchanged the ginger jar for a revolver. All three maids shrieked in unison, but young Norton's steady tone brought instant

quiet. "I wouldn't kick up a fuss, Ware, I really wouldn't," he advised, almost gently. "Things are complicated enough without our getting into a free fight, you know. We don't want the police butting in, do we?"

Suddenly a horrible, gruesome thought seemed to break in upon Ashton Ware's consciousness. His strange eyes dilated, and he took a few slow, stiff steps backward.

"Of course you murdered him yourself," he said, "but how did you make him talk into that phonograph?"

"How did *you*?" demanded Cyril. "Really, it seems an odd thing for a man to arrange all the practical details of having himself murdered, even for the sake of getting a relative into trouble!"

"It was——" The words seemed to choke him.

"I know what it was! I've heard that precious record. It's a beauty!"

"Just the same as—as——"

"As what we heard to-night? Very much the same! With the substitution for yours. But, however down on me my great-uncle may have been, I still think he wouldn't have gone to the trouble of dying in order to convict me for his murder. Come now! How did you arrange it between you—— No, no, my friend! Nothing like that!" For Ware had involuntarily started toward the door. "Don't forget I have you covered, and I'm rather good at target shooting—at short range like this! Speak up, man, or I'll have you arrested within five minutes!"

But Ware was not yet utterly cowed. "I'll repeat my question, if you please," he retorted. "How did *you* get him to get that record?" He shrank a little as he realized to what the emphasis had committed him.

Cyril turned to the servants, Judson, the cook and the two maids. "You all heard that, I think, and can repeat it—as he said it?"

"Yes, sir," "Yes," "Oh, yes, Mr. Cyril!" "Oh, the sneaking creature!" Such were a few of the immediate if somewhat shaky responses. But Ware would not give in yet. "I don't understand—I don't understand!" he muttered repeatedly. Then his pale eyes grew suddenly wide.

"If there was no other record in the phonograph," he said in a sharp, strangled tone, "*what was it I heard?*"

"The voice of the dead," said Cyril solemnly. "You knew of his investigations in psychic matters, and of his invention of the Vocamorta."

Old Judson faintly put in from the doorway: "There *was* a Vockymotta, sir—I know he used to work on it in secret. But I never knew it to work before——"

"Then he is really—dead?" gasped Ware, in choked, incredulous tones.

It must have been clear, even to the most ignorant or the most casual observer, that he was like a man distraught; his brain had been so unexpectedly and strangely shocked that his normal reactions of caution and self-control, of reason and quickness of wit alike, had been set awry. "You are sure?"

"Here is the doctor's certificate of death," said the young man simply, producing a paper and half extending it. Ware waved it aside. Like one in a trance he took a step toward the sheeted figure, and still as though acting without his own volition, put his hand—— Cyril's fingers, surprisingly strong for all their slenderness, closed viselike on his wrist and thrust him back. "Take care!" he exclaimed sternly. "I would not touch him if I were you! Have you never heard of a corpse shedding blood at the touch of the murderer? Ah! That got to you, didn't it?" he added, as the dark man recoiled instinctively, with terror in his pale eyes.

"But," Ware muttered, passing his hand over his wet forehead, "I don't

understand—I swear I didn't kill him! What did the doctor say he died of?"

"He said he was puzzled, and wants an autopsy, but I think it won't be necessary. We've got you very nearly where we want you, Mr. Ware!"

"But," gasped the wretched man, now completely unstrung, "you say he didn't touch the—I mean——" He floundered, trying to gather up the shreds of his self-control. Cyril laughed mercilessly.

"And that about settles you!" he declared calmly—but he still held the automatic. "Gone all to pieces, haven't you? We thought you would!"

"We!" echoed Ware, reeling a trifle as he stood.

"Uncle Adam and I," went on Cyril inexorably. "And now since I really know more about it on the whole than you do—suppose I tell you in a few short, sweet words what you did, before I telephone for the police."

"The police! You're mad! What for——"

"To arrest you for plotting to kill my great-uncle, Adam Norton. No! Stand just where you are and hear it all. You knew Uncle Adam years ago, and made capital out of the only crooked episode in his honest life—that smuggling business in the West Indies."

"He told you!"

"He told me a lot of things, Mr. Ashton Ware, a whole lot of things. He didn't want to go to the police if he could help it, and he and I planned to trick you. You know I like acting, and for once he was willing. He plotted with you in order to get you to commit yourself, and all things taken together, I think you pretty well have! Want to stay and fight for your rights? I wouldn't—not after your ginger-jar break! That was my living uncle who spoke to you—for the last time, I trust, you scoundrel!"

But even before he had finished

speaking, Ashton Ware had dashed away past the startled maids, his swarthy face twisted with rage and terror alike.

"He's gone, sir," commented Judson meekly. "I—I'm troubled about your uncle, sir, if you'll excuse me——"

He drew the sheet from Adam Norton's face and looked down at it anxiously.

But Cyril was in a gale of boyish triumph.

"It hasn't hurt you, uncle, has it, my little comedy-melodrama?" he cried. "He's all right, isn't he, Judson?"

"He's breathing, sir, but, oh, sir, I warned you it would be too much for him. His poor heart——"

Still Cyril rattled on unheeding. "I guess his fangs are pretty well drawn, uncle," he cried, turning to the delicate old face above the white sheet, which still made the maids shiver, it was *that* deathly, as you might say: "He won't trouble you again. But say it was lucky we sent *his* jar of ginger to the laboratory and found it *was* poisoned, wasn't it?" He chuckled. "Good old ginger jars, they all look pretty much the same, and this had him scared stiff!" His voice deepened with a sudden emotion as he came closer. "Of course, it was a crazy, theatrical way of doing it, for any good lawyer could have disposed of him. But you really didn't mind, did you, Uncle Adam? I think we played *our* scene very well. Thank God it *was* only playing a scene!"

"Mr. Cyril, sir——" Judson tried to interrupt.

"Uncle Adam, now that we're rid of the brute, let's turn on that beastly record I coaxed you to make for him." He sprang, laughing, to the phonograph, and started it. Then, laughing still, he faced his uncle again.

"Doesn't it just make the final touch for the scene?" he cried gayly as the instrument began its ghostly "Cyril—"

Cyril." Then he started back, himself as white as death.

"Uncle Adam! Uncle Adam!" he cried wildly. "What's the matter? Has my little melodrama really harmed you? Speak to me, uncle!"

But even as he uttered the words, he knew that his uncle would never speak to him again. The strain and excitement had proved too much for that aged, lightly beating heart. Adam Norton was stone dead.

"It's over, Mr. Cyril," said Judson in a very low voice.

Cyril covered his face with his hands, appalled, remorseful, but the phantom voice of his uncle still vibrated on the air of the death chamber, a spectral, almost a supernatural thing from the cold wooden box in the corner, weirdly accompanying the moment:

"Cyril—it is you who have killed me—you whom I loaded with benefits all the days of your life—it is only you, Cyril, who are responsible for this—you, Cyril—Cyril——"

Judson came softly up to Cyril's side, and laid a shaking, timid hand upon his arm. The maids had gone silently away at last.

"Mr. Cyril——"

The old man's eyes peered into his, dreadful, accusing eyes, the more accusing because they begged for reassurance. "Mr. Cyril, sir," he went on tremulously, "you didn't *wish* for your uncle's death, did you, sir?"

The terrible, ghostly voice from the phonograph went on and on, and the boy broke out into strangling sobs.

"Stop it!" he implored. "Stop that ghastly thing!"

And Judson, immediately if tremulously obedient even in that tragic moment, stopped it.

After a moment of anguished silence, Cyril made his way unsteadily to the door.

"I'll never touch a cent of his money, never!" he vowed, with all youth's pas-

sion and pain. "And I—I'll go off somewhere and try to grow up. My fooling has cost Uncle Adam his life, and—and—God forgive me—I—maybe I wasn't as careful of it as I should have been! Good-by, Judson."

"Good-by, Mr. Cyril." The old eyes blinked at him anxiously. "You're not coming back, sir?"

"No! Never—never!"

"If it isn't making too free, sir, is it a play actor you're going to be after all?"

"A play actor? After this—horror? I've played my last part! It's life, now, and learning how to be a man! Good-by!"

Scarcely conscious of what he said or did, Cyril Norton fled from the room and the house. And Judson was left alone with his dead. He approached near to the sheeted body of Adam Norton, and uncovering the fragile face, strangely stern now, nodded slowly, as one who bows before the will of God.

Then in that still room, beside the deathbed of his master, the old valet drew a long folded document from his waistcoat pocket and opened it carefully, for it was extremely precious.

Again he nodded. This, too, was the will of God—oh, decidedly the will of God! It was another of Adam Norton's wills, duly signed and attested, and there were a few lines that interested Judson as no words had ever interested him before.

... "As my grand-nephew Cyril is quite capable of running away and going on the stage against my wishes, and I am daily hounded by the base ingratitude and extortions of a man I used to befriend, but whom I trust to unmask and disarm before I die, I wish to state that, in the event of no subsequent legitimate claim being made upon my estate, I leave all I die possessed of to my faithful servant, James Judson. . . ."

A third time Judson slowly nodded.

He was pretty sure neither of *them* would put in a claim. As for the lawyers, well, he would just tell them how it was, just tell them how it was. All but——

“Murderer!”

He heard. The one word rang through the room with a strange silver cadence that he had never heard before. He looked about him wildly, in terror unspeakable. He was alone in the chamber of death; he had shut off the phonograph. Yet the voice continued:

“I did not suspect you in life; in death I know you for what you are, Judson. For months you have been slowly poisoning me, weakening my

heart, accomplishing your end by the most fiendish and patient means. You have succeeded——”

Judson had collapsed in a cringing, shuddering heap, but the awful Accuser did not cease. It went on relentlessly with the clarity of a silver bell.

“What is it?” moaned the wretched little old man, beside himself. “What is it? Oh, what is it, what is it?”

But he knew. It was the Vocamorta, the Vocamorta which he had always feared, and it was really working at last; it was the voice of the dead, and that voice was speaking to—him!

In fact, Judson had gone quite mad.



ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH

I ENTERED the bedroom as stealthily as a burglar, and congratulated myself when, in the dim light, my wife appeared to be asleep.

Without warning she suddenly sat up in bed, dived under the pillow for her watch, and peevishly said:

“Frank! It’s half past two! Where on earth have you been?”

Without a second’s hesitation I replied in the most disagreeable voice I could summon up and with exaggerated emphasis on each word:

“Where do you think I’ve been? Out with a chorus girl, of course! Took her to supper, and afterward spent an hour at her apartment, smoking and drinking!”

“Oh, dear!” sighed my wife drowsily. “Don’t be silly. Why can’t you say you’ve been at the club, playing billiards or cards,” and then she turned over and went to sleep!



THE WAX DOLL

by Ezra Putnam



A NICE BUTTERWORTH, beloved and only child of Worthy and Zebedee Butterworth. Aged nine years and three weeks. *Requiescat in pace.*"

That is the inscription. As for the first part, it is plain enough; he who runs may read. But for the Latin inscription, there are those in Sellersville who assert that it has not always been true.

While there is nothing *outré* about the tiny marker with its sculptured words, nothing out of the ordinary about the softly sloping mound, covered as with a coverlet of living green by the English ivy that has grown closely over it, yet there is something strange about that grave that draws a stranger's attention as would a loadstone and holds it until the story of little Anice Butterworth and the wax doll has transformed idle curiosity into deep wonder and aching pity.

About her grave there lies a litter of children's toys, some of them worn and faded, some of them quite new and shiny. And chief among them all is

a great, weather-beaten wax doll, that sits against the headstone gazing vacantly across the burial ground from her post of vantage. Why the toys? Why the battered doll? They are for Anice to play with, you will be told by any Sellersville child.

Poor little Anice! She has her share of toys now. God only knows with what agony of longing and remorse her bereaved parents put them there for her eyes to gloat upon, for her unseen fingers to caress. If it be true that our every action brings with it the appropriate reward or castigation, then how terribly have Worthy and Zebedee Butterworth been punished for their blind, willful ignorance of the heart of a little child!

They had their own ideas about bringing up children, did Worthy and Zebedee. Her people had been the kind that never smiled on the Sabbath day for fear God might be offended at their sinful levity. Zebedee's had been the kind that wept over every penny spent and—figuratively speaking!—killed the fatted calf over each dollar

that came in. The combination of temperaments proved an unfortunate one for the innocent victim.

From the time she was old enough to take notice, Anice Butterworth had been an object of deep commiseration to Sellersville. She was never seen playing as other children do. And she was never permitted a toy. Toys cost money, her father said. Her mother's reason was deeper laid; if we miserable sinners expect to attain heaven eventually, we must offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit she asserted. This was interpreted as a sacrifice of every joy-inspiring emotion of the human heart. Between the two of them, they gave their only child a fine babyhood and little girlhood!

They loved her—her father and mother. They loved her with an affection that almost terrified them by its strength. But the more they realized its depth, the more they felt assured that it was an idolatrous passion that must be strangled in its birth. The Eastern mother's superstitious terror that her babe's beauty will bring upon it the curse of the Evil Eye was as nothing to the fear of these Christian parents that God would punish their presumption in loving so deeply and tenderly what was, after all, a thing of flesh. So they crucified Anice to save her from the wrath of God, crucified her on the cross of their own terrors, and gloated over her misery in a vain belief that they were propitiating the Almighty for her benefit.

Sellersville looked on indignantly but impotently to see the loving little creature crushed slowly and systematically under the Juggernaut created by her parents. She was deprived conscientiously of everything that promised to give her pleasure. Her father repeatedly told her that playthings cost too much, which was his way of refusing her what he felt was harmful to her salvation. Her mother taught her that

God loves those who "fear" Him, and carefully guided those tiny, faltering feet into paths of darkness and terror that the Heavenly Father surely never meant her tender youth to travel. Anice became an old little thing at six years of age—age measured by standards of time; at nine, she was older than the oldest inhabitant, if one judged her age by the gleam of her crushed soul out of inexpressibly pathetic eyes.

It was only natural that people should try to soften the harsh rules the Butterworths had laid down for the little girl, by giving her playthings from time to time. Not that it did much good; either the toys were returned with frigid courtesy, or they disappeared entirely from the face of the earth so far as Anice was concerned. Worthy Butterworth filled every moment of Anice's time with doleful readings from some fearfully pious book of ancient sermons, or with plain sewing, that bane of the life of little girls. Very early Anice had learned to give up attempts to play make-believe by herself; her mother soon learned of this wayward tendency and enforced her ideas upon the child by keeping the poor little creature constantly at her side, busied with her morbid reading or with some patchwork.

On Anice's ninth birthday, nevertheless, Sellersville people plucked up sufficient courage to dare cross the path of the Juggernaut. They got together and bought a special gift for Anice, a wonderfully beautiful great wax doll, dressed marvelously in silk and laces, a doll to have warmed the heart of even the most pampered little girl. The ladies' sewing circle of the Methodist church collected the money for this present with great privacy, and then went in a body to the Butterworth house on Anice's birthday, to present her boldly with the doll.

Worthy could hardly have refused the gift. Her husband had recently

given the church a donation—generous for him—toward new pews, and she felt that the doll was by way of being appreciative recognition on the part of the sewing circle. Zebedee could not have refused it if he would; there was something in the attitude of the ladies presenting it that prevented his saying a word. Moreover, it had cost a good deal and he knew it. He figured it could be put away against the day when Anice would no longer be captured by such worldly toys. Yet both the Butterworths were inwardly certain that the possession of this doll would be the complete ruination of their little daughter.

During the hour that the members of the circle remained in the house, Anice Butterworth sat in their midst, the marvelous doll in her arms, enjoying such an ecstasy of exaltation as the poor little creature had never experienced in her entire short life. On a low hassock she sat, her feet straight before her on the floor, her little petticoats—painfully sewed, washed, and smoothed and ironed by her own busy hands—stiffly refusing to be smoothed down decorously enough to give the wonderful doll a comfortable seat. Not that she noticed this objectively; she was too completely wrapped up in the exquisite joy of holding in her own arms, against her beating little heart, such a plaything as she had never, in her wildest imaginings, dreamed might be hers. To hold it unrebuked—what bliss! What unutterable felicity!

She clung to it, hardly daring a close examination, lest she might draw upon herself the disapprobation of her parents; occasionally she stole a downward glance into the smiling waxen face, with an expression of such tender adoration on her own that some of the ladies afterward declared that it brought tears to their eyes. One hand stroked the silken skirts caressingly with slow motions of luxurious enjoy-

ment; the other gripped the doll to her feverishly. For an hour—one excruciatingly beautiful hour—Anice lived such emotions as other children spread over years of childhood experience.

The ladies rose to go. One of them asked her: "What will you name your doll, Anice?"

Without a particle of hesitation, but as if she had already cogitated long and seriously upon this difficult subject and had come to a firm decision, Anice had replied, a world of affection in her tones:

"Belovéd!"

And amid the cautiously exchanged glances, she buried her face deeply, with a sigh of utter contentment, in the silken attire of her treasure.

Anice's ninth birthday became an event of much speculation in Sellersville, as might be surmised. It was for a time believed that the Ladies' Sewing Circle had managed, by their gift, to alter the attitude of the Butterworths toward the poor little one. Everywhere the wish was expressed that Anice might from then on enjoy some of the innocent pleasures and happiness of life that other children had so freely as their just portion. But our villagers were yet to learn that they had reckoned without their Butterworths.

Out of deference to the opinions of the ladies who had just left the house, Worthy did not immediately exile the wax doll from sight; she took it firmly from Anice's arms and set it high, out of reach, upon a mantel. Do not think this simple act was accomplished with ease; for once in her life the little girl resented from the very depths of her child nature the wrong that she instinctively felt was being put upon her. She clung to the beautiful plaything with fierce strength; she actually kicked at her mother with stoutly clad little feet; she screamed, and gritted her teeth in mad determination not to be parted from her first and only love. Worthy

actually found it necessary to pry the clinging fingers from the silken garments of the disturber of the family by main force.

The worse Anice behaved, the more strongly was Worthy convinced that in keeping playthings from the child she had acted wisely. If the single hour's association with a mere wax doll could affect Anice so terribly after nine years of careful training, how would she have acted, Worthy wondered, had she always been permitted toys?

Zebedee agreed fully with his wife in her action and in her opinion. He went a little further; he took the doll from the mantel and hid it in the garret.

Anice's sad fall from grace was meted out severe punishment, in allotting which Worthy showed her ingenuity. The child had to read aloud page after page of Fox's "Martyrs" for days, while her mother passed in and out of the room to which the child had been banished for a week. She was also condemned to rip out and make over an entire patchwork quilt which she had but recently finished with innocent pride and satisfaction, as well as infinite labor.

The childish mind rebelled, God knows how bitterly, but in silence. She sat quietly in her high-backed chair and read in toneless monotony the horrors of the early martyrs' sufferings; or bent dull eyes upon the bits of colored cloth which she had ripped apart and must sew together again.

When the week's punishment had ended, they missed her one night from her bed, after hearing soft footsteps stealing along the hall. Zebedee intuitively went at once to the attic, the line of his mouth tightening ominously. And it was there he found her, the small face raised to his smiling and contented, the little arms clasped warmly about the bone of contention, which lay against her aching heart. He

stood looking down at her with strange expressions chasing each other across his stern countenance. He returned to bed with the simple observation that she must have walked in her sleep to the garret, and that he had thrown a coverlet over her and left her there. It would be time enough in the morning, he said, to settle with her. Worthy knew only too well what had taken the child to the garret, but she gave no outward sign of her knowledge; she acquiesced with her husband's words.

In the morning, Anice was parted again from the doll, although she showed herself yet more obstreperous and determined, refusing to be separated from her Beloved. The tears, the cries, the pleading, all fell upon unseeing eyes and deaf ears. Such was the love of those two for her future salvation that they damned her earthly happiness completely.

By degrees the child became calmer, but her expression was one that almost terrified her parents by its unearthly resolution.

"I shall always find my Beloved," she declared, rebellious eyes and compressed lips defying them. "You cannot keep her away from me. We cannot be separated, because she loves me as I love her."

That was in late autumn. Winter came on as it sometimes does, in a sudden, unexpected storm of biting cold, bitter winds, and driving snow. From November soddiness of skies emerged the bleak December weather.

During the days that followed Anice made no further outward signs of the rebellion she had so passionately declared. She sewed her wrinkled little patches together again; she read the horrors of the martyrs with dull indifference. But no word, no sign, escaped her in regard to the wax doll. Her parents congratulated each other that she had entirely forgotten it. It was not so, and they were soon to learn

how tragically deep had grown Anice's love for her Belovéd.

Zebedee had put the doll in the woodshed, locking it in without further precautions of concealment from the child, whose great dark eyes followed his every movement as he carried her Belovéd away. He remarked to Worthy, half contemptuously, that he guessed he'd settled that matter for good and all. He was to recall his words afterward with what agony of remorse!

Sellersville can never forget the blizzard that raged for three days that winter, covering the entire countryside with deep drifts.

The third night of the storm Worthy Butterworth roused from her sleep and grasped at her husband, shaking him from his sleep; she thought she had heard a strange noise. He sat up and listened intently.

It was Anice sobbing in her sleep that they heard. And she was calling in heart-rending tones, "Belovéd! Belovéd!"

The mother's heart ached within her. But her thoughts of an angry and jealous God restrained her and hardened her.

"Do you suppose we have been wrong about that doll?" she did go so far as to whisper to her husband.

He shook his head emphatically. But even as he denied the possibility of an error in their judgment, he felt that weakening toward the sobbing, dreaming child which proves to us what playthings we ourselves are in the force of our emotions.

They composed themselves to sleep again, but their dreams were troubled. So troubled that although she could not remember what hers had been about, Worthy rose with the first dim light of a white day, that broke in through the swirling snow beating and tearing with pale, malevolent fingers at the windows, and went to Anice's room

to assure herself that the child was sleeping quietly.

Her wild scream brought Zebedee to her side in a flash.

"My baby! Where is my baby?" she shrieked, sudden terror clutching madly at her heart. "Something is wrong! Something has happened to Anice!"

Her husband strove to quiet her.

"Anice is probably hiding in the garret again," he assured her, but he knew his words were foolish; *the wax doll was not in the garret.*

He began to tremble with the violence of the emotion that shook Worthy, whom he was supporting.

With dazed, vacant eyes she looked from the window as though she could pierce the blinding flurries of snow.

"God, forgive us!" she screamed. "She is there—there!"

She fell, a limp weight, in his arms.

He laid her on the bed. He did not dare wait to bring her back to merciless consciousness, for by this time something pulled at him with invisible hands that would not be denied. He let himself be led.

Out of the kitchen door into the shrieking, howling storm he went, the bitter cold penetrating his very heart, chilling it so that it beat slowly and sluggishly as though some power from without were striving to stop its beating. Down the pathway he plunged blindly, fighting for every step against the surging of that mighty wind, terrifying apprehensions growing upon him with every step. His leaden feet dragged him back when he tried to pull them through the deep drifts that in three days and nights had changed the entire aspect of the countryside. On he went, to the woodshed where, but a short three weeks ago, he had hidden the wax doll away from the longing heart that had loved it so tenderly, from the gentle hands that would have caressed it so lovingly.

It was there he found his only child, as he knew he would. White as the snow that covered her thin little night-dress; pale as the pallor of that dead morning, she half reclined, half knelt as if in supplication, against the door that kept her away from her Belovéd. Upon the childish face was a frozen appeal; in the wide open, staring eyes an entreaty. They were the more pathetic and heart-rending because Zebedee knew their meaning well, and knew that it had gone unanswered.

The father gathered up her poor little body, and holding it tightly to him as though to cool the fires of burning grief that consumed him, fought his way back to the house.

Worthy stood at the door to receive him. Mercifully had the knowledge come to her of the tragic death of her only child; it did not stagger her now as with a sudden blow; she knew well what had befallen. She stood there, dumbly holding out her arms for that precious little body.

It was natural and inevitable that they should have tried everything their brains could devise, in mad and hopeless efforts to call back the spirit of their only child to its deserted habitation. All was vain. They knew it even while they worked over the cold, lifeless body. But their unutterable grief, hoping against the evidence of their senses, drove them on until they reached the moment where they admitted to each other with despairing glances that their efforts were futile. Anice had slipped quietly away from them in the terror of that surging storm of howling wind and driving snow, never to return.

Their grief was terrible, but they repressed it as they had always forced themselves to repress the tenderer emotions of their hearts. The Lord had given; the Lord had taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord! Of their own instrumentality in this tak-

ing away, did they ever think at all? Who knows!

Dumbly, numbly, they went about their daily tasks. Then Zebedee hitched up and went for the undertaker through the wild gusts of wind that whipped him as he drove, while the mother, dry-eyed, sat by the body of her only child.

The storm had died down when the day of her funeral came, so that the morning dawned shining upon a spotlessly beautiful world of dazzling white, in harmony with the pure little soul that had taken flight. They made her grave where you can see it now, and a few days afterward the headstone, so pitiful in its pathetic brevity and the condensed tragedy of its inscription, marked her resting place. They left her then, to repose in peace. But did she? Opinion even in Sellersville is divided on that point.

Zebedee did not go near the woodshed until he was actually forced by the necessity for firewood to unlock the door; he dared not face the silent reproach in the fixed smile of the wax doll, reminding him of the beloved little one who had gone from him forever. When he came out with his armful of wood, a strange expression rested on his face, an expression of mingled incredulity and horror. He said nothing to Worthy at this time.

"I'm imagining things," he muttered to himself.

But the next time wood was needed, he managed that Worthy should fetch it. When she returned, he said to her with a repressed air of excitement:

"Where—where was the doll?"

"On the shelf," she replied, wonderingly, looking at him with query in her sad eyes.

"Were there—were there boxes—piled under the shelf—as if—as if—some one had tried to climb up—to the doll?" he faltered shamefacedly, his eyes avoiding hers.

She stopped short on her way to the woodbox near the stove to regard him with a searching gaze.

"Just what do you mean?" she demanded nervously.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he cried quickly, as if denying an allegation made.

She withdrew her eyes, but stood for a long moment with knit brows before she proceeded with her work.

The following day it was Worthy who went first, early in the morning, for the wood. She had gone with a purpose, because she had lain awake all night hearing—perhaps she had been fanciful, morbid, in her thoughts—the sound as of a child's voice crooning. It even seemed to her that she had distinguished words.

"Belovéd! Belovéd!" the voice kept murmuring plaintively.

She knew she must check her vain imaginings, born of brooding over Anice's tragic death. She realized that the terrible event of the last night of the blizzard had wrought up her nerves to finest tension. But she felt she must satisfy herself once for all that her fancies were absolutely unfounded, so that her reason could in future rebuke them.

Therefore she went with faltering but determined step to the woodhouse and opened the door, the key of which she had herself retained since the preceding morning. Yesterday she had removed a number of wooden boxes from under the shelf where the doll lay, and pushed them to the other side of the shed. This morning, as she peered into the semidarkness, she saw distinctly that *the boxes were back under the shelf, piled one upon the other, as a child might place them who desired to reach the shelf above. And further, the wax doll which yesterday her own eyes had seen lying on the shelf, was sitting against the wall on the floor of the shed at the foot of the boxes!*

Worthy did not advance a foot across the threshold; she stood without, stupefied. Strange and dreadful thoughts assailed her and beat down upon her. She could not bear it, but fled to the house. She made Zebedee go for the wood. Then she went into the rarely used front room, shut the door, and remained alone the rest of the morning.

Her husband did not disturb her; too well he knew why she had gone away by herself. He, too, had seen the pile of boxes under the shelf, put there by other hands than his or hers; put there as if a child had piled them up to reach the shelf where had lain the forbidden plaything.

He brought back wood, but when he came into the kitchen he was paler than he had ever been in his life, and was trembling in every limb. The wood fell unheeded from his nerveless hands upon the floor, and he sank weakly into a chair, struggling with difficulty to compose his thoughts.

Winter passed on with chill and dragging footsteps. Late spring found the Butterworths grayer, more worn, more wan, than even the loss of a beloved child seemed to indicate. The uncanny secret that had become a part of their lives was pulling them down both mentally and physically. By May, Worthy had grown so weak that Zebedee hitched up one morning and went for the doctor.

Serena Lovejoy saw him pass and surmised his errand, for her farm adjoined the Butterworth place. She ran across the private road between the farms and made an unexpected visit to Worthy. At first glance, Serena divined that here was no malady of body but the gnawing canker of mental sickness. Halfway measures by no means suited her, so she abruptly opened the subject to her hostess.

"Better tell me about it, Worthy,"

she said simply and directly. "I half believe I know, anyway, what is troubling you. Perhaps I can find the way out."

Mrs. Butterworth looked long and deeply into the grave but tender eyes of her neighbor.

"Perhaps you can," she considered. Then with sudden sharp pain wracking her soul: "Serena, she is not at rest in her grave! My poor little baby comes back every night—to play—with her wax doll!"

"Poor baby!" whispered Serena understandingly; she was credited with being a seer. "Go on, poor soul; tell me the rest."

"I cannot bear it," wailed the wretched Worthy, her hands pressed agonizedly to her temples. "There is no night that I can sleep. Always there comes her voice calling, 'Belovéd!' What can I do—what can I do—to give peace to my baby's soul?"

She broke down, sobbing into her hands.

Serena regarded her with mingled pity and reproach. She shook her head slowly. Then she put a gentle hand on the weeping mother's shoulder.

"Stop crying and listen to me," she commanded. "Give me the key to the woodshed. And I promise you, Worthy, that you will hear no crying to-night."

It was as she said. That night the

bereaved parents slept better than they had for months. Worthy went across the road the following morning to ask Serena what she had done.

"Go down to the burial ground, to Anice's grave," Serena responded seriously. "I think then—you will understand."

And so Worthy Butterworth received the severest lesson of all her self-sustained life.

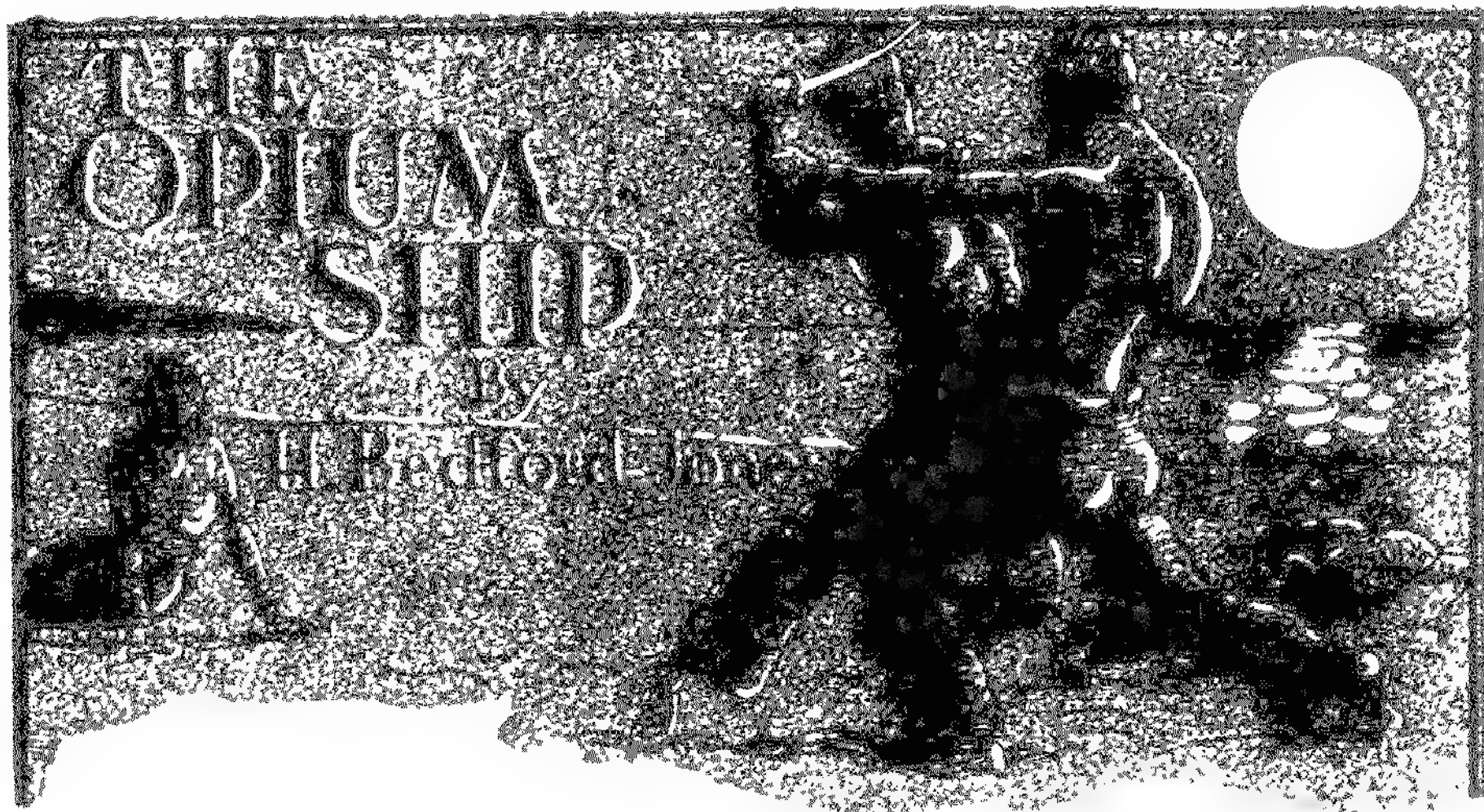
Sitting against the little headstone that marked the grave of "Anice Butterworth, aged nine years and three weeks," was the gayly dressed plaything that had been the innocent cause of the tragedy. Smiling fixedly, blue eyes meaningless and glassy under fringed lids, the wax doll waited patiently for night to bring its playmate back. Anice had not far to go to find her Belovéd, any more.

As the graves of Indian chiefs are loaded with the good things of life, that their spirits may attend upon the phantom of the dead, so to-day the grave of Anice Butterworth is never without a new toy, reverently laid there by the hands of her parents.

And the Christmas tree with its wonderful adornments that each Yuletide presides over the Sunday-school room of the Methodist church, is the annual gift of Zebedee and Worthy Butterworth to the children of Sellersville.

And Anice? "*Requiescat in pace!*"





SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Sir Gerald Desmond, late officer in his majesty's Royal Flying Corps, broke and drunk in Manila, picks up a consumptive Irish fiddler, Michael O'Sullivan, and the two become involved in a free fight with the native constabulary. From this brawl they are rescued by an unknown, and when Desmond comes to his senses, it is to find himself and O'Sullivan shanghaied on the schooner *San Gregorio*, bound for Mindoro Island. Aboard the schooner are the wealthy owner, Don Gregorio Salcedo y Montes, his daughter, the beautiful Dona Juliana, and Señor Arevalo, a rich Filipino, who is a smuggler of opium. O'Sullivan kills the mate with a revolver. Then the two Irishmen start taking over the ship. They set Arevalo to work with the crew, subject Canaughan, the skipper, and commandeer his cabin. But Arevalo, aided by the crew, imprisons the captain below decks and kills Don Gregorio. A mysterious ship called the *Chang Yan*, which Arevalo hopes will soon meet the *San Gregorio*, is heard of. The next day a Chinese junk, commanded by Prince Chan, an opium smuggler, comes into view and starts transshipping a large cargo of smuggled opium to the schooner. Desmond sees an imprisoned white woman, Rosemonde Burley, on the junk, and, dropping overboard, swims to the junk and rescues her. He then sets fire to the junk, and the two swim back to the schooner. The Chinese crew of the junk, driven overboard by the fire, are rescued by the schooner's crew, and, combining their forces, attack the fugitives in the stern cabins. Arevalo and Captain Canaughan are killed in the fray, and Dona Juliana is taken prisoner. That night a hurricane wrecks the schooner on the reefs of Paracel Island. The crew land, taking Dona Juliana with them, and leaving Rosemonde, Desmond, and O'Sullivan on the wreck. In the morning, Prince Chan comes down to the ship to parley for terms between the two hostile parties.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE BEACH.

PRINCE CHAN, still wearing his black coat, although his linen was alarmingly soiled, looked blandly at Balderson; he gave no sign of emotion. The big viking folded his arms and stared at Desmond.

"Oh!" said the latter, getting his pipe filled and lighted. "Now we can chat.

Well, Balderson, why don't you take the money if you want it?"

"With only one gun among the four of us, huh?" snapped Balderson. "Hand over some guns, throw in with us white men—and we'll pull clear!"

"Thanks for your confidence," and Desmond smiled slightly. "Why not hand over the money to Balderson, Prince Chan?"

"Because we want the money our-

selves," said the Manchu, chuckling. "Is not that very logical? Also, we are the strongest party."

"Do you know where we are?" intervened Rosemonde.

"On Paracel Island, we believe," said the prince. "Such, at least, is our guess. We have the place to ourselves."

"Is that a threat?" demanded Desmond.

"By no means. Let us call it a warning, my dear sir."

"Look here, you!" broke out Balderson with a vehement impatience. "Can't you see what these chinks want? They want to put all of us out o' the way, that's what—so's we can't tell no stories! Give 'em this ship, and we're gone once they get their guns on us! It's all us whites in the same boat, Desmond; hang together and we got a chance. Huh?"

Desmond regarded the giant keenly, but made no response. After a moment he turned to Prince Chan.

"Is this island inhabited?"

"No," returned the Manchu.

"Listen, now, while I make ye a counter proposition. You send Doña Juliana aboard here right away, and one o' these boats likewise. By two o'clock this afternoon we'll leave the ship to you, opium and all, taking with us what stores we'll need. That's all. Does it suit?"

"I agree," said the prince quietly.

Balderson was purple with rage, but Desmond turned to the giant with a slow look.

"Mind your talk in the presence of a lady, me lad, or I'll make ye do it! If you and your three mates want to go off with us, you're welcome. I'll desert no man. When we get picked up, o' course, you'll stand your chances of trial for mutiny——"

"Blast you!" cried Balderson, fury sweeping over him. "Won't listen to me, huh? You throw in with them cursed chinks, and d'you know what'll

happen? All hands gets their throats cut, that's what! And the ladies—what d'you think the chinks are layin' for, huh? Women, you fool! See here, you lady! Are you willin' to trust them chinks?"

This was an appeal direct, to Rosemonde. Prince Chan stood blandly oblivious of all that Balderson said, but his black eyes flickered slightly as he looked at Rosemonde. To her, also, looked Desmond. She appeared entirely unconcerned.

"I agree with whatever decision Mr. Desmond makes," she said coolly.

"You'll desert us white men?" cried Balderson. "Desmond, you and your fine talk——"

"You listen a moment," cut in Desmond incisively. "Balderson, you've admitted that you and your friends were partners with Arevalo. You saw your owner and mate murdered; you had a hand in murdering your skipper last night; you helped Arevalo to carry off Miss Juliana. Now that Arevalo is dead and you've lost out, you come whining to me for weapons!"

Desmond rose. "Clear out, Balderson! I'll give you nothing but the wrong end of a fist, you dirty scum! Put a hand to that gun in your pocket and I'll murder you! Get ashore, and keep out o' my way. I want no help from a pack like yours, and I'll give ye none. Thunder o' Finn! If you're not off this boat in two shakes, I'll kick ye off!"

Balderson looked him in the eyes for a moment; then, with a single muttered oath, turned about and leaped into his boat. Desmond gestured to the prince.

"That's all. Send out Miss Juliana and turn over a boat to us."

With a curt inclination of his head, the prince assented and took his departure.

Scowling, Desmond watched the two boats pull toward the shore. It was

obvious that Balderson and his three men were afraid of the Manchus and dared not try to make off with their boat.

"What will ye be tryin' to do now?" piped up O'Sullivan. "Sure, it's no small boat can live long in this wind! Look at the waves out yonder, now!"

Desmond turned, frowning. Both the fiddler and Rosemonde were watching him in anxious waiting; he read unrest and disquiet in their gaze.

"Don't bother me, askin' what we'll do next, Michael Terence," he answered moodily. "Time enough for that when it's due."

"You think Prince Chan can be trusted?" asked Rosemonde.

"No farther than I can see him," returned Desmond. "Will he let us get away to tell all what's happened? Not if he can help it. Balderson was right enough about that."

"Then—you'll keep your word with him?"

"I will," said Desmond doggedly. "Call us when ye see them coming with Juliana, and the fiddler and I will be getting out the stores. Come, Michael Terence! We'd best be movin'."

Desmond, to be exact, thought the situation nothing short of desperate. He had no idea that the Manchu could be trusted, and he would have nothing whatever to do with Balderson. His only chance, as he saw it, lay in putting Balderson into so much more desperate a position that Balderson and the other three would be driven to extreme measures. He rightly judged Balderson to be a dangerous man in action; whether Balderson would attempt any overt act against the Manchus, was another question.

"It's a terrible temptation, Michael Terence," soliloquized Desmond, as he and the fiddler got down into the lazaret and began breaking out stores. "Think o' those heathen Chinamen, with a million in opium and a chest o' gold!

They'll most likely bury the opium somewhere ashore until they can arrange to get it and dispose of it somehow. But the gold they can take away conveniently. No wonder Balderson's mouth waters!"

"And no wonder he's layin' low," added O'Sullivan. "Fifteen o' them divils will fight like fifty when it comes to gold an' opium. It's not me that would be wanting to rob the likes of them! We should ha' took up with Balderson, I'm thinkin'."

Desmond grunted. "Fine business, that would have been! Balderson and his three mates are utter scum. If they took a notion to cut our throats and seize the ladies, they'd never bother about consequences. But the Chinese are canny men, and they look to the end. They're safer to deal with."

"Maybe, and maybe not," said the fiddler dubiously.

Together they got a pile of stores out of the lazaret, or run, and hauled them on deck. As they finished the task, there came from the tree-clad island the sound of a single shot, followed by silence. The shore was deserted, the two boats empty.

"Who's shooting, I wonder?" observed Desmond, while the fiddler and Rosemonde watched the shore with uneasy eyes. "Michael Terence, have that fiddle of yours ready to go ashore; don't forget it and be having to come back after it, now! If it were not for Juliana, I'd swim ashore and haul off those boats."

"But," demanded Rosemonde, "what can we do after she is returned to us? We cannot put out to sea in a small boat—look at the waves outside the lagoon!"

"True enough. By to-morrow we can leave, and until then we'll have to stay ashore. We can run up the shore inside the lagoon and find a likely place."

Ten minutes later, Prince Chan and six of his men debouched from the trees, Doña Juliana accompanying them. Desmond saw that she had quite recovered from the fright which she must have suffered; she was talking and laughing with the prince, who was plainly endeavoring to make himself very agreeable.

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Desmond devoutly. "I was afraid she'd be a nervous wreck—well, Rosemonde! And what are ye laughing at now?"

"You," retorted Rosemonde merrily, but refused to explain herself further.

The boat took in tow the second boat, and drew out to the schooner. The latter was now heeling farther over, as the tide was ebbing, and her rail was not far from the water. When the boats came alongside, Desmond caught Juliana's hand and brought her easily to the deck.

"Welcome home!" he cried. "It's well you are? That's good. If you'll join Rosemonde, and get your things packed up, we'll be leaving presently. She'll explain matters. Well, Prince Chan! How soon will ye have the ship?"

"Whenever you leave her," answered the Manchu, looking up from his seat in the boat.

"What was that shooting ashore?"

"Balderson shot one of my men," returned the other, his features placid and masked. "You had better be careful about going ashore; he and his comrades are in the bush."

"Oh!" thought Desmond. "So you are already certain that we'll go ashore, eh? That's bad." Aloud, he said: "Thanks for the warning. We'll be gone in an hour. Think you can get the schooner off the rocks?"

Prince Chan smiled and shook his head.

"No. What could we do with her? What port could we enter? No, we shall attend to the opium and then de-

part in our boat. In an hour, then? Thank you. Au revoir!"

Desmond watched them rowing in toward the shore, a puzzled frown creasing his brow. The Manchu had spoken too openly, too frankly.

"Well?" said O'Sullivan. "The ladies are below, sir. What d'ye think that boy has been cookin' up for us, eh?"

"Murder," said Desmond, turning and meeting the piercing black eyes of the fiddler. "Murder, Michael Terence, and no less! He knows we'll have to get ashore for a day or so. By that time they'll have the stuff buried. They'll finish us, to keep us quiet. Aye! We're in a tight place, me lad. If 'twas you and me, now, I'd put out to sea in the boat, but we can't do that wi' the ladies."

After a moment he continued, reflectively: "There's something big to all this, me lad. Arevalo was a rich man in his way, and, mind you, he was buyin' a million dollars' worth of opium, roughly! Buyin' it for a syndicate, most like, a syndicate of hellions like himself. But they couldn't keep a million in a chest, not if it was in gold."

O'Sullivan chuckled.

"By this an' by that," he said sagely, "I've a notion what's runnin' in your mind this minute, I have! If 'twas not for the ladies, now——"

Desmond rubbed his chin and smiled with sudden hope. "Listen, now! Doña Juliana has been cruelly wronged, isn't it? Arevalo owes her somethin'. And Rosemonde the same. Besides, would it be right to let those yellow men steal all that money? It would not."

The fiddler laughed wildly. "And there's you and me, sir, into the bargain! Could we be doin' it, now? As the skipper would say, it 'ud be a righteous deed."

"We'll see. Let's be getting the stuff into the boat, lad."

They were still working with the provisions when Rosemonde appeared and informed Desmond that Juliana wanted to see him. She was getting a few things together and had been acquainted with the situation.

Desmond passed below to the cabin, where he found Juliana, now wearing a gown of deep-yellow silk, making a bundle of her things. She faced him with a tragic gesture.

"We must leave all this—be abandoned?"

"Be glad you're getting out of it safe, Miss Juliana," returned Desmond. "We'll have worse yet ahead, I'm afraid. The yellow men intend to murder us all if they can do it—they aim to catch us off guard later on."

Her blue eyes flashed. "Ah! But you will prevent this?"

"I'll be thinkin' about it," said Desmond whimsically. "Bless the sweet face of you! Was Prince Chan very entertaining?"

"He was a thorough gentleman," she answered, albeit a trifle coldly. "He rescued me from those ruffians, and was very polite."

"Oh!" said Desmond, and smiled into her eyes. "If any one had foretold a month ago that you would be kidnaped and shipwrecked and have all these excitin' adventures, would you have believed it? I'll warrant not. It's changed you, too."

"How?" she demanded a bit suspiciously.

"Well, it's put new life into your eyes, and a marvelous fine color into your cheeks, and the most wonderful——"

"This is neither time nor place for compliments, sir," she broke in hastily, yet with no displeasure in her eyes. "May I ask when we are going ashore?"

"As soon as you're ready," said Desmond. "May I take this bit bundle?"

He stooped for it, and she stooped as hastily in order to tuck in sundry

tag-ends of lace. For an instant their hands touched. Desmond straightened up with the bundle, and turned to the door.

"Come when you're ready," he said blithely, and was gone.

Had he seen Juliana standing and gazing after him, a heightened color in her cheeks, her bosom rising and falling rapidly, and her blue eyes widening upon his departure, he might have been a trifle uneasy. But Desmond was oblivious.

He saw to loading the boat methodically. As he had anticipated, the mast and sail had been removed, and this confirmed his suspicions of the Manchu. However, Desmond got into the sail locker and located a spare spanker, which he turned over to the fiddler.

"Load it in, me lad; it'll serve to shelter the ladies to-night. I'll introduce ye to the mysteries of needle an' palm to-morrow, and with the aid of an oar we'll go away from here on the wings of the wind—if we go. I have a notion that we'll stop a while."

Doña Juliana came on deck, and after getting her in the stern with Rosemonde, while Michael Terence carefully bestowed his fiddle case forward, Desmond took an oar and the two men shoved forth.

"It's hardly the appropriate sort o' shipwrecked party," observed Desmond cheerfully, "since we've no outfit of weapons beyond four automatics and the natural battery of languishing orbs which you ladies possess. However, we'll make the best of it and trust to luck for the rest."

He guided their course northward, away from the boat which still lay upon the sands, and kept O'Sullivan at work until the lagoon, whose outer reef formed a breastwork for the entire length of the island, narrowed down. They were nearly a mile from the schooner by this time, and when at last he perceived a tiny creek that emptied

itself into the lagoon, Desmond swung hard on his oar and headed for the shore.

As they pulled up the boat, O'Sullivan was taken with a fit of coughing. Desmond eyed him for an instant, and caught a significant glance from Rosemonde.

"Run off with you, Michael Terence," he said, "and make sure the vicinity is clear of Balderson and his murderin' friends. I'll be makin' camp the while."

The fiddler departed, and vanished among the trees. Desmond began to unload the boat, at which Rosemonde came to help him, and later Doña Juliana. He chose a fair camping spot beside the creek and had the heavy work done long before O'Sullivan returned with word that there was no sign of other folk in the vicinity.

With the spare sail mounted on trees and oars as a canopy for the ladies, O'Sullivan played his fiddle when the sunset was crimsoning; and afterward, saying that the black mood was on him, set the fiddle under his arm and vanished along the shore to the north.

"He will not last long, poor man!" said Rosemonde softly. "His cough——"

"I know," said Desmond, sucking at his dry pipe. "And he knows, too, more's the pity!"

Doña Juliana leaned forward. "Did you ever see him smile? There's something rarely beautiful in his eyes when he smiles. The soul, perhaps. And you say that he is not blind to his illness? Ah! That is unusual, I believe. Usually men *are* blind to the things that concern them so closely and deeply."

Rosemonde looked at Doña Juliana. Under the darkening shadows the eyes of the two women met and held for a space, and in their gaze were strange things, strange depths and silences. Doña Juliana drew a long breath like a sigh.

"I'll be leaving you," and Desmond rose to his feet. "Good night, ladies. God be with you the night!"

He strode off into the darkness, whistling softly. But the two women **did** not speak after he had gone.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE NIGHT.

DESMOND wakened at midnight, or shortly afterward. He and O'Sullivan had been stretched out in the sand; now, in the starlight, Desmond saw that the fiddler had disappeared. He lay quiet, wondering what had so distinctly awakened him.

There was still a steady wind blowing, rustling the palms and trees of the island, while the surf crashed and boomed unendingly from the reefs. Suddenly a thin, distant sound punctuated the boom of surf with sharp distinctness. That must be the second shot, thought Desmond, as he rose and pocketed the two pistols which had lain beside him. The sounds were too distant and slight to awaken the women, he reflected.

"What made Michael Terence slip off, and how long's he been gone, now?" thought Desmond.

He strode off down the beach in the starlight, confident that things were happening at the other end of the island, or thereabouts. With the morrow, he felt, they might put to sea in the boat—but he was by no means anxious to put to sea until he had to. He had remembered that upon reaching the outer world he would be penniless, and the thought of Arevalo's chest was very good to linger upon.

The beach, widened by the ebb tide, stretched before him like a white ribbon, bounded by the dark trees and the darker water; a phosphorescent glow marked the outer reef, and the white line of the surf there. Suddenly Desmond, looking at the reef, out of the

tail of his eye saw something move on the beach behind him; he turned swiftly, and saw a dark figure advancing upon him.

It was Rosemonde.

"I heard the shots, too," she announced simply.

"Oh!" said Desmond. "I took for granted you'd watch over the camp while I was gone."

She came closer, looked into his face, and suddenly broke into low, sweet laughter that was very joyous to hear.

"You almost fooled me, monsieur."

Desmond grinned, but a trifle ruefully. He had not thought that her brain was quick enough to catch his ruse.

"Come along, then," he said. "We'd better keep in close to the trees, I'm thinking. Did you leave Miss Juliana asleep?"

"Sound asleep—and very beautiful. Did you ever see a more beautiful woman?"

"No," said Desmond honestly. "But sheer beauty in itself doesn't matter particularly. It's character that counts, that makes beauty. I think, now, that if Juliana had the proper training, like a few months more o' this sort of life, she'd be twice as beautiful. Her complexion might be spoiled, but she'd have more behind the complexion."

"And you would like to educate her, then?"

"No! Will you stop twisting my words, now? I'd sooner be walkin' along the sand here with you than educating all the beautiful women on earth!"

"You don't count me among the beautiful ones?" questioned Rosemonde demurely. "Well, I admire your frankness, at least! *Souziens-toi de ceci: on n'a que l'age que l'on parait—*"

"*Taisez-vous,*" said Desmond suddenly, halting her with a touch on her arm. "There is something moving ahead——"

He was cut short by a low cry, a cry barely heard, yet appalling in its agony. It seemed to come from directly ahead of them, and an instant later a dark shape came staggering out upon the sand, to fall prostrate.

"Wait here," commanded Desmond, and ran forward.

He found himself stooping above a man—one of the Manchus—who had been stabbed terribly in the side. The man must have died as he uttered that low, wordless cry.

Desmond peered into the night. A dark mass offshore indicated the wreck of the *San Gregorio*; it was without a light, seemingly abandoned. But the second boat, which should have been drawn up on the sand, was gone. Desmond rejoined Rosemonde at the edge of the trees.

"I don't understand this," he said, perplexed. "That boat's gone, yet the Manchus seem to be still ashore—that is one of them, stabbed to death."

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Then the big-bearded man, this Balderson, has attacked the prince."

"Will you return to the camp?" demanded Desmond, suddenly grave.

"*Merci, non!*"

"Then come."

He set off across the sand, Rosemonde at his elbow, skirting the trees and seeking some sign of the encampment which he knew must lie in among the trees. Insensibly, Desmond quickened his stride until he was a few feet ahead of Rosemonde.

A shadow moved among the trees, a mere blot upon the blackness close at hand. A long finger of the shadow seemed to lick out at Desmond's feet; tripped by the stick, he fell headlong. The first touch had warned him, although too late to save himself. As he plunged to the sand he flung out his arm; his automatic exploded. A dark figure that had sprung out upon Rosemonde, behind him, whirled and

screamed once as it plowed into the sand.

That shot saved Rosemonde, but a heavy body hurtled out and fell full upon Desmond as he lay. Rosemonde, taken off guard by the sudden outleap into action, not yet comprehending the amazing swiftness of Desmond's shot, stood above the dead man, staring at the twisting figures before her. She could not tell which was friend, which enemy.

The sense of smell, the faint raw scent of opium, told Desmond that the man above him was a Manchu. His pistol was useless, his arm gripped by the man's knees; he doubled up, and a knife scraped past his side. Before the blow could be repeated, Desmond got his hand about the yellow neck, jerked the man forward across his body, and wrenched himself sideways.

This freed his pistol arm, but he did not fire. Instead, as he squirmed up over the yellow man, he struck a queer oblique blow with the pistol, and then a second. After this, Desmond rose and shook the sand out of himself, while the throat of the Manchu blackened in a pool beneath the stars.

"It's remarkable what ye can do with a pistol when the front sight is properly filed," said Desmond calmly, stepping toward Rosemonde. No other assailants were in sight.

"Oh!" she gasped slightly. "You're not hurt? He stabbed——"

"*Il n'y a rien de cassé*," returned Desmond. "They say in books that a man armed with a knife is at a positive disadvantage—and it's true enough he is, after he's missed his first lunge. The divil of it lies in makin' him miss the first time."

"Your bullet passed within a foot of me—after doing its work," said Rosemonde.

"I know it," answered Desmond contritely, "but I could not help it. Ye see, if you had not been here I could

have attended to those fellows very decently, but havin' to protect you as well as meself——"

"Could you feel better, then, if I returned to camp?" demanded Rosemonde.

"Heaven forgive me for sayin' it, but I would! Not that I think ye need protection, mind, but for me own peace of soul, because you're the most distracting person I ever met, fairy mistress, and——"

"Very well," she broke in. Turning abruptly, she started back along the shore.

Desmond looked after and rubbed his chin thoughtfully; she might be angry over her dismissal, but there was no help for it. He now wanted to take action upon his own account, and was relieved that Rosemonde had returned.

He was wondering why two of the Manchus, and no more, had been here; also, what had become of their boat. His shot seemed to have attracted no attention. It might or might not have been heard through the sullen but heavy booming of the surf. For ten minutes Desmond cautiously skirted the trees, hearing nothing. The place might have been an island of the dead, but he knew very well that it was nothing of the kind. No moon was up, but the sky was clear as blue-black crystal, and under it the starlit waters and reef and beach—a rare beauty in it that clutched at Desmond's throat. The lagoon, black yet faintly radiant with phosphorescence, the peculiar sheen of the foaming reef like greenish-white jade, the opalescent coral dust of the beach, where the very sands leaped and quivered with invisible tropic life——

"Damnation take it, I say!"

The words leaped out in front of Desmond like a bomb. He halted, crouched low, waited.

"What's his game, huh?" It was Balderson's voice now, followed by a crashing of leaves. "He gives us a

gun. All right. Why? What's him and Desmond planning?"

A light broke upon the listener. So O'Sullivan had slipped off, had carried Balderson one of his pistols! Why? Desmond laughed softly to himself, plainly perceiving the fiddler's strategy. O'Sullivan had been thinking, also, of Arevalo's money—the chest which was acting as a pot of honey to flies—and had provided Balderson with an aid toward the killing of the Manchus. Balderson was set upon killing, no doubt of this.

"Dunno," came a more sullen voice. "King and Billy are down to the south end, lookin' for the boat; the chinks are lookin', too."

"There was nothing at Desmond's camp, huh?" queried Balderson.

"Nothin'," responded the other. "One o' them wimmen was stirring, so I didn't stay. Their boat's there, but not the other one. We can grab theirs at a pinch, I guess."

Balderson rumbled his viking laugh. "Not until daylight, Tom—not until daylight! That man Desmond will be watching, huh? Takes no chances. Too many surprises waitin' at night, but in the daytime you can see what you're doing. Find the chink you knifed, huh?"

"No," growled the other. "But I got him right—plumb in the guts. Who was that shootin' over here."

"Dunno," said Balderson. "King, maybe, or Billy. The chinks are all split up tryin' to find their blasted boat. Where in hell is that chest gone, huh?"

"If we'd known earlier that they didn't have no guns to mention," said Tom, "we'd ha' played hell with 'em! But that yellow devil bluffed us with his slimy talk. Maybe they sneaked that chest out to the schooner, Balderson."

"Huh?" The big viking's voice was startled and bovinely thoughtful. "Mebbe so, Tom, mebbe so. Hadn't

thought of it. B'lieve I'll swim me out there and see, huh? We know there ain't none aboard. It's like them chinks to take the chest out and stick her some'ers, huh? Hide her away. Then they come ashore with some dope, and their boat gets lost come night. Damn' queer, huh?"

"Guess I'll swim out there with you," said Tom. "Two can look better'n one."

Crouching lower against the sand, Desmond saw the two black shapes against the stars, passing within a few yards of him. There was nothing to be feared from Balderson for the present, obviously.

"It's cleared up most amazing, all but the loss o' the boat," reflected Desmond. "All hands seem to be puzzled by that. Thunder o' Finn! Why didn't I think of it meself? If it was Michael Terence, now, who stole that boat, he's a genius! That's why there were only two of the Manchus back there; the prince has split up his men searching for the boat. And he's ashore, somewhere to the south of here, and inland. Also, the treasure chest is lost, like most of 'em are sooner or later. But it's not aboard the wreck; it's close to wherever Prince Chin himself is. And to think of the amazing divil having maybe two or three guns, no more, but bluffing all of us with his power!"

Turning abruptly into the trees, he headed across the island. There was little undergrowth; the trees were mostly of good size, the island being too low and storm-swept to admit of small growths. Consequently, Desmond found the progress easier than he had anticipated, the starlight aiding him greatly.

Again and again he paused, vainly listening for some guiding sound. There was no sign of a light or camp fire. Prince Chan was lying perdu—where? Where was the fiddler, that mad, lovable, half-dying Irishman?

With the uncanny sharpening of the perceptions that comes with night and darkness, Desmond felt a sound. He heard nothing; but the slight, almost noiseless vibration of the air that touched his ear, was carried to his brain, and he halted instantly. Now the sound recurred, and he stood very motionless, holding down even his breathing. He sensed danger, and sensed it close at hand.

Not from the sound, however; he had already recognized that as the hacking cough of O'Sullivan. It was somewhere among the trees, not far distant—but it was muffled nearly to nothing. Then, as he stood listening, he caught the *timbre* of a voice on the night; no words, just the formless tone. But he also recognized that as the voice of Prince Chan, the Manchu.

Ah! A shadow materialized ten feet from him; a man was approaching him, silently, a blot against the stars. Desmond crouched low, moving an inch at a time, then crouched in absolute stillness. The dark figure came to within three feet of him and the flowing blouse betokened one of the Manchus, but not Prince Chan. For an instant Desmond saw the face, but the man turned about, listening. As he stood turned thus, Desmond rose and reached out with his reversed automatic. There was no sound beyond the slight thud.

Catching the senseless man as he fell, Desmond searched him rapidly. He found two knives, heavy affairs with brutal steel-and-sharkskin handles, and took these; but no pistol. The man was a sentry. Somewhere beyond here was Prince Chan. Desmond delayed long enough to bind the man with strips of his own clothing, then rose and stepped forward. He had no doubt that O'Sullivan was with the Manchu prince.

Five minutes afterward, Desmond came upon the object of his quest. A treeless hollow, ten yards across, opened in front of him. A faint whiff

of wood smoke told him that there had been a camp fire here during the day, although it was now extinct. The black figures of four men showed themselves.

Prince Chan was speaking in English, his words carrying softly but distinctly:

"If he coughs, then muffle him; he cannot help the cough. But if he tries to call out, stab him at once. You understand perfectly, my man?"

"Divil fly away with you, I do!" answered the voice of O'Sullivan.

Desmond, aided by the voices, distinguished that the fiddler was lying down, probably bound, while Prince Chan and two more Manchus sat beside him.

"Will ye be giving me some dry clothes, now?" queried O'Sullivan, a shiver in his tone. "It's a dying man I am unless——"

"You have been for a little swim?" came the purring Oriental voice. "It was you who stole that boat?"

"Yes, it was," retorted O'Sullivan, defiant now. "And she's gone where ye'll not get her again, since I took her out beyont the reef on the ebb tide."

There was an interval of silence, followed by an exchange of low conversation among the Manchus. Prince Chan again reverted to English, a smooth menace in his voice:

"You did this by Desmond's order, my man?"

"Sure I did," said O'Sullivan audaciously. "Did we not discover what ye planned to do with us? So we joined in with Balderson, if ye want to know the truth of it."

"And Balderson has been killing my men to-night!"

"I hope to hell he kills the whole pot of ye!"

"Oh!" Prince Chan laughed softly, terribly. "And what do you expect me to do to *you*?"

O'Sullivan did not answer.

At the edge of the clearing, Desmond

took one of the two heavy knives and drew back his arm. With a flint of his wrist he sent the knife high in air, clear over the glade, to fall with a tinkling clatter among the trees on the other side the clearing.

CHAPTER XI.

OFF!

AT the sound occasioned by the falling knife the three Manchus leaped upright. But Desmond had already hurled the second knife, this time far to the right among the trees. As it crashed through the branches Desmond spoke unconcernedly and coolly.

"All set, Balderson? Very well. Don't any of you fire until I give the word, because I want a little talk with the prince. Don't move now, Prince Chan. You're covered three ways!"

From the prostrate O'Sullivan came a long breath like a deep sigh.

There fell a momentary silence, broken again by Desmond's voice.

"Cut my friend loose, prince. Then you step this way and we'll have a chat. Don't worry about the wet clothes, Michael Terence; the salt water won't hurt if it dries on you."

One of the standing figures stooped. A moment later O'Sullivan rose, stretching himself.

"What about that gun o' mine?" he inquired.

"Prince Chan will give it to you. Then come over here."

"Here is your weapon," said the prince smoothly. The fiddler took it and sauntered toward Desmond. Behind him followed the prince, until Desmond halted him.

"That'll do, me friend. Now, suppose ye tell us what was in that chest of Arevalo's? Mr. Balderson thinks there was money to be had, and he's uneasy."

"Money?" repeated Prince Chan,

staring at the spot where Desmond stood. "Yes. There was something like two hundred thousand dollars in American notes."

"And where's the chest now?"

The voice of the Manchu rose in querulous, shrill rage.

"May the gods curse you! It was made fast under the stern of the boat which this man set adrift——"

"None o' your lies!" snapped Desmond angrily. "How could a boat be drawn up ashore——"

"Holy mackerel!" gasped O'Sullivan, now standing beside Desmond. "It's the truth he speaks, sir—divil take me for a fool! The boat was anchored a few feet out from shore, and I noticed that she dragged in the water, like—oh, murder! And to think o' me settin' her adrift an' all! *Mhuire as truagh* on me for a fool!"

This astounding intelligence put a damper upon Desmond. He had intended to put Prince Chan under restraint, then to lie in wait for Balderson as the latter swam back from the wreck, and, after this, to dictate terms. Now, however, he had nothing left to fight for; the incentive was removed.

To take away any opium would be folly, since the stuff was contraband everywhere and he had no ambitions to smuggle it. Arevalo's chest was another matter, however. It was lawful loot, and now it was floating somewhere out upon the bosom of the deep, carefully set adrift by O'Sullivan.

"I could take a boot to ye, Michael Terence," said Desmond severely, "but I will not. 'Twas all innocently ye acted, and for the best." Leaning over, he put his lips to the ear of the fiddler. "Back to camp with ye as fast as legs will carry you, me lad! Wake the ladies and get the stuff into the boat. We'll have to get out of this in a hurry. Run! And look out for Balderson; he was over at the wreck last I saw of him."

O'Sullivan chuckled to himself, then faded into the background.

"I'll not bother ye further, prince," said Desmond. "I believe it's the truth you're telling about the money; serves you right for hiding it from me. The wreck is yours, so make the most of it. As for Balderson——"

"May the tenth hell swallow you!" cried out Prince Chan, sudden intuition giving him the truth of Desmond's ruse.

Turning, the prince ran furiously across the clearing toward the point at which the supposed Balderson was concealed. Desmond laughed, seeing the two other Manchus join their prince. As the three reached the opposite trees, however, there was the flash and sharp report of a shot; Desmond felt the wind of the bullet.

"Ah, ye would, ye slick divil!" He fired, and again. Then, whirling, he set back toward the beach at a run, ignorant whether his bullets had reached a mark.

"There'll be the divil to pay now, and no mistake!" he reflected as he steered a devious course among the trees. "Our boat is the only one available, and all three sides will want it. Whoever gets it first will stand a chance o' finding the other boat; she can't be far off now——"

He had come to the edge of the trees, and there he paused, startled by the scene before him, where the white sand stretched down to the lagoon.

Rising out of the water's edge were two figures, and foremost of them was Balderson. About his tangle of hair had been wrapped his pistol belt, and he looked like some wild Poseidon upheaved by the sea, his great beard dripping over his chest.

"Balderson!" Desmond started forward. "Get to cover, you fool; the yellow men are after me hot! I shot two of 'em. I've no love for ye, but unless ye want to be murdered look out for yourselves——"

Balderson and his companion promptly rushed for shelter of the trees. Desmond slipped off to the left, confident that for the moment they would not trouble him, and then took to his heels.

It was his hope to get clear away from the island without further encounters. As soon as Balderson discovered the boat to be gone entirely there would ensue a three-cornered fight for possession of Desmond's craft, and Desmond meant to get away before Prince Chan could gather his men for an attack. The money was a secondary affair.

"Michael Terence certainly put his foot in it to-night," he reflected as he ran. "To steal the boat was a prime notion, but the lad went a step too far; then the chest of money under her stern settled everything. If we can get off, we might pick up the other boat ourselves, but for the sake 'o the ladies we'll get off."

When he reached the camp he found O'Sullivan hustling their supplies back into the boat and Rosemonde emerging to lend a hand. A moment later Doña Juliana left the shelter, which Desmond promptly stripped from its supports.

"I've no time to be talkin' now," he exclaimed hurriedly. "Roll down the boat, Michael Terence! A minute's delay may mean all of us with our throats cut."

The two men shoved the boat at the water, the women watching in silent anxiety. Then, with the last of the dunnage loaded in, Desmond left the fiddler to hold the craft while he returned for the ladies. He picked up Doña Juliana with a word of apology for his haste, and waded out with her to the bow; but Rosemonde had followed, careless of the knee-deep water, and was climbing into the stern sheets before Desmond could assist her.

"All right, Michael Terence!" exclaimed Desmond as he clambered in

"Straight out to the reef, me lad; there's an opening in it almost opposite us. Quick, now!"

At each instant he expected to hear bullets singing out from shore, but the long oars urged the boat out toward the reef, and there was no alarm. The island remained black and silent. While he rowed, Desmond gave a brief exposition of the situation for the benefit of his companions.

"Easy up, now," he admonished O'Sullivan. "The reef opening is just ahead. Miss Juliana, will you have the kindness to lean over the bow and keep watch for rocks? We'll have to watch over our shoulders, and may miss a few. All right, Michael Terence—*pull!*"

The oars dipped and gripped. The boat roared down into a hollow between the seas, her bottom scraped, then she was ascending the next sea with a surging hiss of foam, and with two strokes they were out beyond the reef.

"Thank the saints!" muttered Desmond. "Now let 'em fire all they wish! Where did ye leave that boat, me lad?"

"What boat?" demanded Rosemonde, knowing nothing of the treasure.

"The other one," and Desmond laughed softly. "Pull ahead, Michael Terence! She can't be far away—down near the other reef opening most-like. Keep watch for an empty boat, ladies!"

The ladies made no response. The island had become formless, a vague black shape which closed sea and sky, and which was still entirely devoid of any light or sound.

Desmond knew that the other boat could not have drifted far. Being high in the water, the set of the wind would naturally hold her back toward the reef, as would the attraction of the land. Besides, it was unlikely that O'Sullivan had taken her far out, as he confessed himself to be no great swimmer and had been afraid to venture far.

"I see something!" called Juliana

softly from the bow. "Off to the left; something black on the water——"

"Right," added Desmond, getting a glimpse of the thing himself. He felt no strong excitement over the possibility of finding the treasure; merely a laughing recklessness. Money of itself meant too little to him for the thought to rule in his mind.

"Now ahead of us!" cried Doña Juliana quickly. "Be careful——"

They slid down a long wave, and with a final tug on his oar Desmond sent them alongside an empty boat that loomed suddenly from the darkness. He rose and pulled the other craft around until he could get at its stern.

Ah! There was a rope, cunningly fastened—and another; from them a square box. No large affair, this; only a box two feet by one, of narra or ironwood. Getting a secure grip upon a handle which his fingers encountered, Desmond cut the lines with his knife and hauled the box aboard.

"Done!" he exclaimed, tossing it at the fiddler's feet. "We'll open it by daylight, me lad——"

"What's in it?" asked Rosemonde.

"Ah, that's a surprise!" Desmond chuckled. "Eh, Michael Terence? A bit of a surprise, if our luck holds good. Get the mast and sail out o' that boat now. We'll leave 'em this canvas, for I've no time to be bothered with it——"

"See here!" exclaimed O'Sullivan, who was trembling with mingled cold and excitement. "Is it goin' to leave them the other boat ye are? And where are we goin' to, anyhow?"

Desmond laughed. "Going? D'ye know that by to-morrow night we'll reach the mainland, or before? Coast o' China, Michael Terence; whether it's French China or the real thing I don't know nor care. Sure, we'll be leavin' them this boat. Let 'em fight for it if they can swim out and get it. All aboard now! Catch this spar and sail out——"

"We're going out to sea, and to China?" demanded Doña Juliana, awe in her voice.

"We're nearly to China now, *mo cuisle*," returned Desmond with infectious gayety. "And by to-morrow night, praise be, we'll have finished the trip."

"But these waves—these mountains of water——"

"Sure, they're just mountains of water, and who's afraid of water? Get ye some dry clothes, Michael Terence. Rosemonde, have ye dry stockings and shoes? Then we'll give you and Miss Juliana the fore part o' the craft, once we get the sail up, and you'll have the best going in the way o' privacy, fairy mistress of me heart! To work, Michael Terence!"

As he dragged the mast and sail from the other boat he uttered a sharp exclamation and paused suddenly. From the dark line of the island came the crack of a pistol; close upon this came a second shot, and then silence again.

When the dawn lightened over Paracel Island, bringing the reef and shore and trees into faint relief against the dark western sky, it showed a dark head bobbing out beyond the reef. This bobbing head approached a larger black mass floating upon the waves, and merged with it.

Meantime, aboard the wreck of the schooner, three men were busily engaged packing a common seaman's chest with small, gaudily labeled tins. As the dawn lightened they broke off work at a hail from the shore. It was Prince Chan who hailed, and Balderson stood in the rigging to make answer.

"What you want, huh?"

"We've found the boat," answered the Manchu.

An oath fell from Balderson. "Got the chest, did you?"

"No. Desmond had taken it and left

the boat floating. Throw in the opium and we'll take you into partnership."

"Hell!" spake one of the three men to Balderson. "What'll he do with the dope?"

"Answer quickly," floated the suave voice of the prince. "We must leave at once. We have sighted the sail of Desmond's boat, and he is heading due west. We can dispose of the opium if we reach the French-China coast, but only in small quantities."

"Throw in with 'em!" advised the man King. "They got Billy, but we got a few of them to even up. There's seven of them and three of us. Let's go."

"All right," boomed Balderson's voice. "Bring your boat along and load up. We agree."

Half an hour later, the boat, under a sail rigged by Balderson's deft hands, bore out from Paracel Island and rounded the southern end. Sunrise was breaking. In the boat were crowded seven Manchus and the three white men. Amidships was the seaman's chest with its load of five-tael opium tins.

The morning was half gone when, as the boat topped a great wave, Balderson stood erect in the stern and gazed westward.

"After 'em!" he cried, his yellow beard afloat in the wind. "We'll not catch up, huh? But we'll be on their heels."

"That's very good," said Prince Chan, smiling thinly. "The money will be easily divided. And the women will——"

"I want the one we agreed on, remember!" scowled Balderson.

"Of course," agreed the suave Manchu. "And I want the other one, certainly!"

The two men grinned each at the other, and Balderson reflected that chinks were human beings after all.

The Crystal Ball

By
James
Cary
Hawes



PERHAPS you have seen Vernon Shelley on the screen, starring in the numerous comedies and dramas released by the Peerless Feature Film Corporation. If so, you probably remember some of the other principals in that famous celluloid crew, notably Dolly Cameron, the delicious ingénue; Monty Field, the dudish juvenile, and Roy Hedges, the keen-eyed villain, all of whom appeared with Shelley in his greatest picture, "The Crystal Ball," which portrayed the actual melodrama following his discharge by the Peerless boss, Marcus Rosenstein.

Near the Peerless studio are the Plaza Apartments, where resided Shelley and Monty and bachelor quarters presided over by their Japanese Friday, Toyo. On the morning after Shelley found himself out of a job Monty dashed in like a charge of cavalry.

"See here, old man," he demanded excitedly, "what's this I hear about you and Rosenstein?"

"All true," admitted Shelley; "he canned me, and now he's afraid I won't

pay back the money I had borrowed from his company. Can you beat it?"

Monty tried to register sympathy. "Deuced luck, I'll say, Vern. Are you really up against it?"

Shelley pointed to the table. "Look at that stack of unpaid bills, as tall as the Woolworth Building. Take it from me, Monty, the candle shouldn't be burned at both ends."

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, find me a fortune that needs an owner."

"Do anything for you, Vern. Buck up, old man; the first hundred years of life are the hardest, they say."

With this optimistic advice Monty slapped Shelley on the back and went out the door just as Toyo entered with the mail, which consisted of several more reminders of indebtedness.

"Good morning, Friday," mumbled Shelley, without looking up from the morning paper. "Bringing more trouble, I suppose. Any one call for me last night while I was out?"

"Not very much, sir," stammered

Toyo in his best English. "Was only some newspaper gentlemen and the gentleman Rosenstein and more other stranger gentlemen."

"That all?" laughed his master. "Well, I wasn't expecting the United States army. Not much chance of getting lonesome when I'm that popular."

Toyo laughed, too, being sufficiently Americanized to know that employers' jokes must at all times be appreciated. Then the doorbell rang, and Toyo responded like a fire horse when the gong sounds. With a quick, important walk entered the unwelcome Mr. Rosenstein, a fat, dark little Jew with a goatee and many dazzling diamonds that flashed in his red necktie.

"I suppose you know what I am here for," proceeded Rosenstein, frowning portentously, "and you must also know that it is up to you to settle your obligations."

"I'm aware of the fact," Shelley acknowledged as calmly as he could. "Do you know of any one looking for a sober, reliable janitor?"

"Young man, I mean business," snapped the creditor, beating his fists together irritably. "Do you realize you owe a sum of money that you haven't got?"

"Sit down, Mr. Rosenstein; I have a proposition to offer."

"I tell you I will not consider any sort of a compromise," broke in Rosenstein, his hands twitching. "A fifty-fifty split won't tempt me, so you're wasting time."

Every outburst of his effervescent guest amused Shelley the more. "Why," said he, "no one mentioned a compromise. That was only a trick of your active imagination. Now listen here, I intend to pay every cent I owe you, with interest for every moment I retain it. That ought to——"

Preferring to use his tongue more than his ears, Rosenstein could not keep

still. "Didn't I tell you," he snapped, "that promises will not pay debts?"

"Yes," returned Shelley, "it was well put, and I don't blame you for feeling proud of it. But now see here, Mr. Rosenstein, the only way I can pay you is by borrowing elsewhere, and that, of course, will take some little time. So if you will return to-night, say about nine, the full amount will be waiting here for you."

"No," refused the creditor, shaking his head vigorously, "I will not return because I have decided not to leave. By to-night you would be in China or Australia."

"Such traveling hasn't been invented," Shelley assured him. "You'd better think over my proposition before answering."

Rosenstein did think it over. His eyes fell on the closed door, then on the young man's determined expression, and forthwith he realized that this was his only opportunity. Jerking a small notebook from his pocket, he began to figure zealously. His face took on a wry look as if he were swallowing a pill which did not taste pleasant.

"Very well," he concluded, springing to his feet, "I'll agree to that. Let me out. You may expect me at nine sharp, and I shall not be alone."

Shelley was pleased, yet perplexed. He knew that nine o'clock would roll around very quickly and that, when one is in debt, raising money is like raising polar bears on the equator.

"I'll do my best to have the money ready for you," he said, opening the door and showing the dapper gentleman out. "But if you receive any other invitations for to-night, don't let my engagement interfere. Any other night will do just as well."

"You'll see me to-night without fail, and I won't be put off again. Good day."

Shelley closed the door behind him and returned to his chair, where he sat

excavating in his collection of financial worries. While thus morosely engaged, Monty, the cheerful cherub, returned like a ray of purest sunshine, as the poet would relate, bearing glad tidings of untold wealth in store for a poor, moneyless motion-picture actor, known professionally as Vernon Shelley.

To be more explicit, Monty was so crazy with excitement that he seized his dazed pal and began dancing around the room like an almost human chimpanzee.

"Congratulations, Vern, old man," he kept repeating. "Great news. You're a rich man."

"See here, Monty, what's eating on you?" demanded Shelley, breaking loose.

Monty thrust a crumpled newspaper at him, and commanded: "Read that; page two, fourth column."

One glance at the paper was enough to short circuit Shelley's thought generator and give him a sudden yearning to sit down. There was a chair beside the reading table, but he missed it by several inches because the whole pesky universe had begun whirling. Jubilant, Monty gathered him up and held the incredible news before his bewildered gaze. Above Shelley's picture was the heading, "Movie Star Likely Heir to Langland Fortune." The rest was a blur to the prospective heir.

"See, old man," explained Monty, "it says your old aunt has told the world she won't leave you a cent to blow for wild oats, but if you're married and settled down you get all the coin instead of her servants getting it. See? Seems she's strong for double harness. And now she ain't expected to live only a few hours, so it's up to you to find a mate *p. d. q.*"

Shelley had completely revived. He read the article over three times without stopping for breath, and sighed:

"Sweet music from heaven." It seemed like a moving-picture plot instead of the real thing. He had inherited many film fortunes, but none of said fortunes had affected him like this one.

Monty walloped him on the shoulder. "Gad, Vern, you're a lucky cuss, I'll say! How many millions is it?"

"Enough to marry Dolly and keep the wolf away," guessed Shelley.

"But, Vern, if you marry and then your old aunt recovers there'll be the devil to pay, eh, old man?"

"And Rosenstein," added Shelley, and immediately rushed out the door bareheaded.

It's a good half mile from the Plaza to Dolly Cameron's dressing room at the studio, and Shelley's record for the distance would remain immortal had it been recorded. Out of breath, he knocked at her door and called: "Big news, Dolly; can I see you?"

The door opened quickly, and he stepped into a small room littered with costumes and cosmetics. Before a large mirror the Peerless ingénue was busily making up as a Japanese geisha girl.

"Stop, look, listen!" he ordered excitedly, draping himself over the corner of her dressing table. "Big surprise, Dolly. Rich! Millions!"

At the word "millions" she dropped her work. "Who's rich, Vernon?"

"I am. Ain't it **funny**? Millions! Can you beat it?"

Dolly laughed. "A millionaire actor! Don't make me laugh when I'm made up."

"All I have to do is marry and the money's mine, Dolly."

"Oh, you're going to marry an heiress," she suggested.

"No, no, Dolly; you're no heiress."

"But who would give you a million dollars to marry me, Vernon?"

He showed her the wonderfully absorbing news item.

"Dolly," he asked after she had finished reading, "do you remember what

I whispered to you when you were holding my hand in that Red Cross hospital scene? Remember?"

"And you almost made me spoil the picture, naughty boy."

"Well, I meant every word of it, Dolly, and a lot more besides. Honestly, Dolly, I'm crazy about you, and every time I see you it gets worse."

"But you're sitting in my cold cream," she interrupted, laughing.

Without heeding, he drew closer to the eyes, hair, and teeth, which photographed more perfectly than any in filmdom.

"What d'you say, little girl?" He grasped her hand. "Will you have me?"

She gave him her other hand, too. "Of course I'd have you if I could. I think more of you than any man, Vernon, but I can't have anybody now. You know, old cross-patch Rosenstein thinks the public loses interest in an actress when she marries, so he put it in my contract that I must stay single."

"Rosenstein be darned!" exclaimed Shelley. "What does a millionaire's wife need with a job?"

"But I can't give up my career, Vernon. I've struggled for it all my life and I love it—love it more than anything else in the world."

He released her hands with disappointment. "Yes, I suppose it is asking too much of you," he admitted. "It means a fortune to me, but I guess I can manage it some other way."

The telephone rang, and Monty informed him that a telegram was waiting for him. But it did not have to wait long, for Shelley dropped the telephone and departed.

Six o'clock that evening found Shelley on the verge of committing matrimony. He was sitting in the twilight, silently contemplating this desperate act, when Monty blew in like a gust of wind, carrying his golf equipment and a smile which little showed that

he had lost a half dozen balls in as many drives.

"Just in time," Shelley declared. "Sit down; I have something to tell you."

Monty obeyed. "Go ahead. I'm the best little listener that ever listened."

"If you didn't talk so much," added Shelley as a truthful joke. "Keep this to yourself. Did you pass any one leaving as you came in?"

Monty's ears pricked. "No, old man; who was it?"

"A young lady whom I just proposed to. She's to return soon to marry me."

The listener leaned forward with interest. "Another, eh?" said he. "Gad, Vern, what's the matter with Dolly?"

"Can't marry until her contract expires. My aunt's worse, so what the deuce could I do but find a wife? A pretty little lady called, selling encyclopedias, and I told her my plight. She fell for me hard, and, like a fool, I proposed to her. She's a very young widowed orphan named Laura Parsons."

"That's interesting," exclaimed Monty; "deuced interesting. Sounds like a book romance, you know. When will she be back?"

"As soon as she can pack a satchel," replied Shelley, surprised at his own actions. "Then we'll be married at once. You must stick around and meet her."

Monty objected that he was not looking fit, but stayed nevertheless. After he had asked a million questions and Shelley had put his packed suit case beside the door in readineses, they drifted back to the den and passed the time, while waiting, by playing a few uninteresting hands at pinochle. Shelley's mind was no more on the cards he held than on the north pole, so for once in his life Monty was not swamped. A little before eight o'clock Toyo broke up the game by announcing that Miss Parsons was in the library.

"You know, old man," said Monty, "three is a crowd. You go on in and have your tête-à-tête. Then, when you are ready to leave, call me. Really I don't feel presentable in these knee-breeched things; feel awfully like a plagued chorus man."

Shelley agreed, rather than argue, and hastened to the library alone. Entering, he stopped abruptly in the doorway, his senses incredulous of what his eyes beheld. For the young woman, instead of sitting ladylike in her chair, was crouched over in the corner by the bookcase. Her back was turned so that she did not see him for several seconds. Silently he stood watching as she drew a large volume from the shelf and hid behind it a small morocco jewel case which she took from her bodice. Then, with a heavy step, he advanced to apprise her of his presence.

"That's not a very safe place to conceal your valuables," he said evenly. "Better let me put them in the wall safe."

Instantly she returned the treasure to her person and whirled about. "Oh!" she exclaimed, very excited and somewhat cowed. "Never mind bothering. I'll just carry it with me. It's only a little keepsake that my husband brought from the war. You know he was an English army officer and was killed in Flanders."

She talked rapidly, as if fearing that he would ask some questions. Her rather young face was flushed, and her quavering voice had all the petulance of an emotional actress. She was neatly and plainly dressed, in such clothes as a wealthy lady's maid might wear.

"Surely you are too young to have married before the war," said Shelley, puzzled by her uneasiness.

"What was I thinking about?" she corrected herself nervously. "My husband died of—of pneumonia just after the war ended."

"Pneumonia," mused Shelley, only

half convinced. "What month did you say?"

"Let me see." She moistened her lips and twisted her interlocked fingers. "Strange I can't remember that. The date of his death seems to have slipped my mind completely."

"Perhaps it doesn't matter just now," said he, throwing off that matter in order to broach another. "I'm afraid I am a very inquisitive rascal. How did you ever think of hiding your keepsake behind a row of books?"

She became still more ill at ease. "I've often done it, Mr. Shelley. Don't let the thing annoy you; it's only a trifle. Are you all packed for our honeymoon?"

"Yes," was his subconscious reply as he strove to conceal his growing suspicions.

She stepped closer, overly impatient. "When do we start, Mr. Shelley?"

As a matter of fact, he was feeling less like starting every moment, though she was undeniably pretty and the thought of Rosenstein and his aunt told him to hurry. "We must leave at once, Miss Parsons. But first hadn't you better let me put your keepsake in the safe?"

Again she lost her composure. "It's of so little importance that I'll just carry it, thank you."

"Valuables are an awful nuisance when traveling," he warned her. "If you wish, I'll promise not even to open it."

After considering a moment, she surprised him by handing it over, watching the door as she did so. Just as he took it the front doorbell rang. He had no idea who it could be. Quickly he asked Laura Parsons to step into the adjoining room to wait, which she did reluctantly.

The morocco case was very heavy to be so small, and as he attempted to put it into his pocket it fell to the floor and burst open. Picking it up, he

beheld a handful of jewelry nestled glitteringly in the purple satin lining of the case. There were rings, brooches, lavallières, and one immense ball-shaped diamond strung on a rope of pearls. The latter stone was different from anything he had ever seen, in that every color of the rainbow was visible deep down at the center of the white crystal.

He hastened back to the den to see what had become of Monty. At the sight of the big gem the latter's eyes bulged. "Gad, Vern, where'd you get it?" he asked, quitting his game of solitaire.

"Sh! Not so loud," admonished Shelley. "It belongs to Miss Parsons; at least she says it does. Here's the rest of her plunder. I don't know why it is, Monty, but somehow nearly everything she says strikes me as a lie. She's terribly nervous about something. I was a fool for thinking I could marry a stranger and forget Dolly. Confound it, Monty, what should I do with her?"

"Don't come to me, old man. You know that I'm a muddle-brained chap. Anything I'd tell you to do would be the worst thing."

"Now that she's on my hands I don't know what the devil to do with her," sighed Shelley, placing the treasure in his pocket. "There's another caller waiting to see me, Monty. Come and sit in; I may make use of you."

After depositing his willing aid behind the draperies in the alcove just off the library, he went in to greet whoever the newcomer might be. The first thing to meet his eyes was the muzzle of a diminutive, pearl-handled revolver. It was aimed directly at his head by a pale-faced, sad-eyed young woman in handsome mourning. She stood about in the center of the room, a composed, stately creature, with coal-black hair and pompous, virile movements.

"Hands up!" she commanded in a melancholy voice.

"Cannons are unnecessary here, madam," he assured her after he had found his voice. "If I were the worst criminal outside the penitentiary I wouldn't harm a guest in my own home. Have a chair."

"Put up your hands or I'll fire!" she insisted, and he humored her. "What's your name?"

"Vernon Shelley. What's this—a holdup game? Who are you, anyway?"

"Ethel Edgeworth, widow of the late Lord Edgeworth, son and heir of William Albert Edgeworth, Earl of Kenbrook," replied the lady in black. "The murderer of my husband is hidden here. I have traced the Crystal Ball to your door."

This bit of startling information caused Monty's head, which was listening close to the draperies, to hit the wall with a thud. Shelley's eyes stared unseeingly. Although he had met several titled ladies, none had ever before honored him with a visit.

"Sorry, Lady Edgeworth," he said, "but I don't understand what you are talking about. I've never made a practice of cultivating the friendship of murderers, and I don't know whether the Crystal Ball is a race horse or a parlor car."

Her expression never altered. "The Crystal Ball," she explained, "is a large ball-shaped diamond which is famous all over Europe because of the misfortunes that have always befallen its owners. Since it was mined many years ago by Maharajah Pandukurah, a Hindu potentate, it has been stolen eighteen times and has caused seven murders."

Again Monty's head thumped the wall. The unlucky thing in Shelley's pocket seemed suddenly to burn against his body. He was strongly inclined to throw it out the window, lest it should bring him some ill luck. They sat down now opposite one another, the little weapon lying in her lap.

"Six months ago," she continued with difficulty, "my husband fell heir to the valuable stone. Just a week ago he was murdered in his bed. Both his body and the jewel case disappeared, and have not been seen since that night. On the same night a man and his wife, who had been our servants since we came to America a year ago, also disappeared. Naturally they were suspected of the crime; but the authorities were unable to apprehend them. So I offered a reward of twenty-five thousand dollars, and undertook the task myself."

"Well, what do you want here?" asked Shelley, fumbling with the precious thing in his pocket. "My time is limited to-night."

"The Crystal Ball is here," she said, her drooping eyes surveying every corner of the room with catlike quickness. "I happened to pick up the trail from a pawnbroker, and now I have followed it here."

"See here," demanded Shelley, very much puzzled, "are you a real titled lady? Did all this actually happen, or did you read it somewhere? Sounds to me like a movie."

"Certainly I am Lady Edgeworth," she declared in hurt tones. "And I intend to search for my husband's murderer till death."

"Well, Lady Edgeworth, you don't accuse me of murder and burglary, do you?"

"Not unless you have the Crystal Ball," she told him, her melancholy eyes fixed on him relentlessly. "I am quite positive some one has it here. You won't object if my detective searches the place, will you?"

Immediately he felt the blood leave his face. In the alcove Monty almost fell off his chair. Shelley was undecided whether to give her the treasure right then or to question the thief again and attempt to win the fat reward. His

eyes chanced to fall on the clock, and brought him to his feet instantly.

"Whatever you do," he said, "please be brief about it. My aunt is dying and I must leave town as soon as possible."

Her features betrayed her suspicions. "Very well," she agreed, "I shall summon my assistant and begin the search at once."

The next moment the tension was tightened by the sound of the doorbell. Shelley breathed harder.

"Ah, another caller!" he exclaimed. "Lady Edgeworth, I'll have to ask you to postpone your search for a few minutes. Monty," he called louder, "come and show the lady into the next room."

Trembling perceptibly, Monty stepped forth with his eyes glued always on the revolver which she was putting in her mesh bag. Then he assumed the guise of butler and led her out, returning immediately in feverish excitement.

"Gad, Vern, what are you going to do with it?" he whispered. "Hadn't you better call the police? We're going to get ourselves in a lot of trouble."

"What!" said Shelley. "Call the police so they can get the twenty-five thousand? Not on your life, Monty! If that woman is what she says she is and knows what she's talking about, then the Parsons woman is the wife of the murderer. By questioning her we ought to be able to find her husband. That may be him at the door now."

Monty trembled still more. "But, Vern," he quavered breathlessly, "a wad of money won't do us any good after we're full of bullet holes. A woman that wants revenge is liable to do anything. She's so blamed serious she gives me the creeps."

"Aw, calm yourself!" admonished Shelley, holding the beautiful jewel up to the light. "There's nothing to get excited about. Go back and sit in the

alcove until I need you. When I yell you come. Understand?"

"No, no, Vern," whispered Monty as pale as a ghost. "Listen here, man, we don't know anything about catching murderers. I never saw one in my life. If he would kill one man he'd kill more. You can have the reward, Vern; I don't want it. My life is worth more than the coin, so don't call on me."

Shelley smiled and put the treasure box back in his pocket. "Monty, do you believe all this Crystal Ball story?"

"Sure. Don't you?"

"Confound it, I don't know whether to or not. Sounds awfully far-fetched. If it didn't fit so well with this ball-shaped diamond I'd think the woman was one of those cranks who imagine they are somebody else."

Monty looked like a scared hare. "Cranks are dangerous, Vern. Take it from me, she's too dangerous to fool with."

"You were cut out for a soldier," declared Shelley sarcastically. "But you ought not to dislike the woman; she saved me from that Parsons girl. I was badly fooled, Monty. The girl looks more like a queen than a crook."

"They are both dangerous, Vern. I wouldn't trust either of them behind my back, and I wouldn't touch that unlucky hunk of cracked ice for a thousand dollars." Monty rubbed a nervous hand across his brow. "Seven murders already! Just think of it, Vern, seven! I tell you, man, you'd better send for the police and get rid of this mess before your aunt dies."

"We will get rid of it by ourselves just as soon as I see who is at the door," said Shelley quite confidently. "Can you believe it, Monty, we hold the key to a lord's murder? Now hurry back to your post before our prisoners get restless."

Just as he shoved excited Monty through the draperies into the alcove Toyo approached with a total stranger.

The third addition to the variegated collection of strangers proved to be a towering, cosmetic blonde with the sky-blue eyes of a porcelain doll. Entering in four strides, she spread herself nonchalantly in the first chair she came to. Shelley stood aside, scrutinizing her earnest face, her expensive clothes, her large black earrings, her rakish hat set on an abundance of yellow hair. He guessed her age as near thirty.

"Are we alone?" she asked immediately.

"I'm afraid so," replied Shelley, who heartily disliked that melodramatic question.

Before speaking again she cautiously eyed both doors. Behind her back, Monty's frightened face appeared and disappeared between the draperies like a full moon on a cloudy night.

"Mr. Shelley," she proceeded confidentially, "there is an impostor here—a woman who is passing herself off as Lady Edgeworth in order to secure a rare diamond which was left by my husband. I am the real Lady Edgeworth. When the stone is recovered, it belongs to me. It is known as the Crystal Ball, and was stolen when——"

"Yes," interrupted Shelley; "I've heard all that. Expect I could even tell the thief himself several things he did not know about it. Lady Edgeworth, number one, has related the whole affair."

She was undaunted. "I want to say, Mr. Shelley, that I shall make it very unpleasant for your friend if she attempts to claim the Crystal Ball."

"My friend!" he blurted out. "I never saw her until to-night, so I can answer for none of her shortcomings. She may be a lady or she may be an adventuress, for all I know."

"She is an impostor," reasserted the blonde in her rather husky voice. "I've been following her for two days, and now I will settle with her or have a satisfactory explanation."

After considering a moment, he spoke up quite frankly. "Say, look me in the eye and tell me the truth. Are you stringing me? I mean, are you the real Lady Edgeworth?"

Monty marveled at his boldness. For a moment she would not answer. "You insult me with such a question," she said loftily. "It's useless to answer."

"That's exactly what the other one said," he puzzled. "I'm overwhelmed by calls from two distinguished ladies at once. Never in my life got into such a crazy mix-up. Seems to me you women have been reading the same dime novel, and you both imagine you are the violet-eyed heroine."

She ignored his banter. "Where is the woman who is trying to rob me?" she demanded. "Let me see her."

"I would much prefer that you two hold your conference somewhere else." He glanced impatiently at his watch. "Nothing would please me better than to stick in the midst of this Crystal Ball mix-up, but I'm getting married to-night."

"You shall not shield her," hotly declared Lady Edgeworth number two. "Let me see her at once."

"Shield her!" he exclaimed. "Don't get that into your head. I told you I never saw her before."

"If she is not a friend of yours, what is she doing here?"

"You'll have to ask her about that. She came of her own accord."

"Let me see the woman," she threatened, "or I shall cause trouble."

"Well, be sure you make it brief. I can't be detained." He rose with trepidation, for he feared the results of their meeting. Both were very determined women, and the little pearl-handled weapon was still on his mind.

As he started for her, the overworked doorbell rang. Quickly he asked the yellow-haired Lady Edgeworth to wait in another room while he received the latest arrival. Handing her a maga-

zine to read during the wait, he showed her into a room separate from those occupied by the other two. When he returned to the library, Monty's head was peering questioningly from between the alcove draperies.

"Gad, who's at the door now?" he whispered, creeping forth.

"How do I know," responded Shelley. "Say, which do you think is the real Lady Edgeworth?"

That question held no place in Monty's mind. "I must be going to bed," he said with a haunted look. "Honestly I must, Vern. I feel so dreadfully out of place in these golf clothes. Really, old man, I must say good night."

Shelley gripped his shoulder. "Aw, you're just scared, Monty. Stick around; I think I'll need you. Here they come. Get back in there."

As Monty disappeared, Toyo appeared with a *chic* little lady all snuggled in furs. At close range, Shelley saw that she seemed somewhat older than he at first supposed, that her face was too thickly powdered, her features hardened by dissipation, and her finery in extremely poor taste. He sized her up immediately, for he had been about city streets after dark enough to recognize her sort at a glance. She was young in years, but old in experience and appearance.

"I want to see the wife of Lord Edgeworth," she said in a direct, familiar way.

"Which one?" he asked jestingly.

"Quit the kidding," she reproved. "Let me see her—the one that has the Crystal Ball."

"Which one owns it?" he persisted. "The yellow-haired one or the black-haired one?"

She looked at him as though he were crazy. "I never saw her, so I don't know what kind of hair she has. That don't make any difference. All I'm after is the diamond."

"How did you know her ladyship was here?"

"Her maid told me: I heard Lord Edgeworth was dead, and went right away for the Crystal Ball. Here's the letter from him promising to give it to me."

She brought out the note, but he made no move to take it. "See here," said he, "I don't know a thing about this affair. I wish you would tell me what you know. How does it happen you have never seen his wife?"

"There wasn't any use making her unhappy by letting her know her husband had other women friends," she explained quite openly, "so Lord Edgeworth always kept her in the dark about me. He was strong for the women—all except his wife. He did a lot of crazy things, but he sure knew how to shell out the coin. I ran across him when he first came to America."

Shelley was such a confidential listener that she probably would have told her full history, had he not interrupted: "Seems to be quite a scramble after the jewel. How much do you suppose it's worth?"

She laughed, a half-cracked giggle. "How much? Well, when little Nell gets it she won't have to worry with the men any more."

He was very much amused at the little worldly wise stranger. "Did you know the Crystal Ball was stolen?" he asked.

She grasped the arm of the chair with one hand and put the other to her throat. "My Gawd!" she gasped under her breath. "Stolen! The Crystal Ball stolen?"

"Yes." He fumbled with it in his pocket as he spoke. "Even Lady Edgeworth does not know where it is. She has offered twenty-five thousand dollars for it and the murderer."

"Twenty-five thousand," repeated Nell breathlessly. "Well, she is fooled

if she thinks it belongs to her. It's mine; I have it in writing."

"Lord Edgeworth must have been very fond of you," suggested Shelley.

"I guess so," she sighed, crestfallen over the disappearance of the treasure. "He was a handsome chap, but awful silly. His folks called him a black sheep because he fell for the women and roved all over the world instead of staying at home."

"Are you positive that the man you have in mind is Lord Edgeworth?" asked Shelley.

"Sure," she answered. "He has often shown me the Crystal Ball and told me all about himself."

At that moment the doorbell announced still another arrival. Rising quickly, Shelley took a few steps toward the doorway.

"I'm sorry the Crystal Ball has disappeared," he said. "There's nothing you can do about claiming it until it is recovered."

Contrary to his wishes, she did **not** leave her chair an inch. "I want to see Lady Edgeworth, anyway," she said determinedly. "I've got to tell her something."

It was a perplexing moment, for this Nell Somebody was an embarrassing guest. There was nothing for him to do but get her out of sight the quickest way possible. So he asked her to wait outside, and showed her into a room separate from the other three. His waiting list was growing much faster than he realized.

Returning to the library, he found Monty peeping out as before. Just as he opened his mouth to say that he had to go, Toyo silenced him by bringing in a wide-awake, bright-eyed young woman with a very businesslike manner and gait. Her attire gave immediate evidence that she was bent more on bread and butter than anything else.

"I'm Dottie Dills, feature writer for the *Star*," she said, before sitting down.

They shook hands. "I'm sent, Mr. Shelley, to get a few facts and perhaps an interview concerning your leaving the Peerless Feature Film Corporation."

"Sorry not to ask you to have a chair," he said evasively, "but my time is completely taken up. I'm leaving town to-night."

"Then perhaps you have a recent photograph to give us," she persevered. "We have several old, press-agent ones at the office, but no late ones that do you justice."

He smiled and handed her a picture from the table. "I would gladly tell you how little I know if I had the time, but there are others waiting to see me."

Right here she showed her reporter's pluck. "If I sit out in the hall until they leave, may I have a few words with you then?" she begged.

Not knowing what else to do, he agreed and sent her triumphantly to her post. At once Monty stepped forth from his hiding place.

"Gad, Vern, isn't this an awful mess?" he whispered, beyond himself with excitement.

"Might be worse, I suppose," said Shelley, who had dropped into a chair and was trying to think.

"Be reasonable, man," begged Monty. "What will you do if some of those crazy women get together?"

"Call the coroner," replied Shelley, still trying to think.

Monty's face was wrapped in seriousness. "The whole blasted gang are liars. All they are here for is to rob us."

"Well, they won't get much," consoled Shelley. "Here's the only treasure on the place. Look, Monty, isn't it a beauty?"

As he rolled the wonderful ball-shaped stone on his palm, a myriad of flames flashed in every facet. Monty gazed at it like a snake-charmed rabbit.

"Gad, it must be worth several for-

tunes!" he exclaimed. "No wonder it has caused seven murders. Better turn it over to the police, and get rid of the whole gang."

"Which one do you think is the real Lady Edgeworth?" asked Shelley, ignoring the advice by putting the jewel away.

"None of them," quickly answered Monty. "They are all robbers working together. I don't believe a word they said."

Monty talked on while Shelley sat pondering, his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees. With Dolly, Rosenstein, his aunt, and the Crystal Ball mystery on his mind, there was considerable mental turmoil. He was all at sea in a high wind and a leaky boat.

"Say, Vern," said Monty, "you've got more on your shoulders than you can carry. What the devil are you keeping those women here for?"

"To find the murderer of Lord Edgeworth," replied Shelley plainly. "Go and bring the one named Laura Parsons in here. I'll make her tell where her husband is, if she has any, and whether they were ever servants of Lord Edgeworth."

As Monty left the room to summon the first witness, Shelley happened to notice by the clock that it was exactly nine, the hour that he had told Rosenstein to return for his money.

Then the telephone rang, and, finding the call was another creditor, Shelley determined to relieve himself of further annoyance from these persistent gentlemen by disconnecting the wires. This he did with his penknife.

At two minutes after nine Rosenstein and his escort arrived. As had never occurred before, Toyo failed to respond to the bell, so Shelley had the honor of admitting them himself. He was almost swept off his feet when he beheld the escort, who was a broad-chested, flat-footed police officer with

an uninviting smile. Concealing his astonishment, he led them immediately into the library.

As they passed through the hall, Dottie Dills, the *Star* reporter, who was sitting inconspicuously in the corner, took a lively interest in the blue coat and brass buttons. Instinctively she dived into her shabby handbag for pad and pencil in preparation for a story.

Shelley very gallantly shoved chairs at the two visitors, but they preferred to stand, hat in hand, the glossy apex of Rosenstein's bald head being exactly on a level with the shoulders of his burly aid. Then the host passed a box of cigars, and again the pair of sphinxes were unresponsive.

"Now what can I do for you gentlemen?" he asked with a deferential air.

"Are you that forgetful?" exploded Rosenstein, red in the face. "It's nine o'clock, the hour you set to pay me."

"That's so," calmly observed Shelley. "I'm very sorry that you find me unprepared."

"Then you break your promise?" Rosenstein was clawing his goatee. "You mean you can't pay me?"

"Haven't had time to borrow the money, Mr. Rosenstein," explained Shelley. "I've been on the jump with other matters every moment since you left."

"Excuses don't pay debts," declared the creditor. "I will not be put off again."

"My aunt is not expected to live," explained Shelley, "and I am her only heir. She has willed me enough to pay you several times. So, you see, you have nothing to worry about."

For business reasons, he thought it best not to mention the marriage proviso. They stared at him dubiously.

At that inopportune time Monty, who had been sent to fetch Laura Parsons, entered with her. When they saw the policeman they were panic-stricken. Turning quickly, she darted for the

door, but her escape was obstructed by the officer's two hundred and fifty pounds. Monty was the color of new-fallen snow, his knees almost refusing to hold him up.

"I told you that diamond would get us in bad, Vern," he cried in a tremulous voice. "Officer, I don't know a blooming thing about these women. I never saw them before, I swear I never."

"What diamond? What women?" snapped the brusque officer.

Shelley shot a silencing glance at Monty just in time to prevent him from laying bare all he knew. As the latter shrank back, the officer seized his arm rather roughly.

"Come on, don't hold nothing back," he growled through his coarse, black mustache. "Where's this diamond you're talking about?"

Shelley stepped forward to attempt to help Monty out. "You see, officer," he explained naively, "he's a foreigner and gets his words mixed. Don't listen to him."

"Who's this lady?" demanded the officer, pointing at Laura Parsons. "Guess you'll call her a nut, too."

Shelley was too hard pressed even to appreciate Irish wit. "She's a neighbor of mine," he hastened to reply. "Aren't you, Laura?"

She tried to say yes, but was too frightened to do more than nod her head. Monty cringed as far as he dared away from the two callers, who looked questioningly at each other, at a loss to know what to believe or do.

"Things look suspicious," concluded the officer, handing Rosenstein a revolver. "You stay here and watch this bunch while I stroll around a bit. These people are holding back something, and Gus Murphy is going to find it."

Had Gus Murphy expected to find what he found, he doubtless would not

have been so keen for a stroll. After stationing the timid guard in the hall door, he departed toward the rear in quest of a diamond and some women.

It was a very uneasy crowd he left behind him in the library: Rosenstein was afraid of the weapon in his trembling hand; Shelley was afraid his aunt might die; Laura Parsons was afraid her identity might be discovered; and Monty was afraid of his shadow.

In less than a minute the returning searcher stuck his head in the door. His hair almost standing on ends, he summoned the master of the house.

"Somebody's murdered," he gasped.

Every face turned white. Rosenstein dropped his gun as if it were hot. Before the officer could give further instructions, the whole pop-eyed crowd rushed like a pack of hungry buzzards to find the dead. Lying lifeless on the dining-room floor in front of the buffet, they found good old Toyo. There was no trace of blood, bullet wound, or mutilation of any kind. He lay in perfect repose.

It was a heavy blow to Shelley; like losing one of his own family. He dashed wildly about the room, looking for some clue, but found none. With Gus' assistance he lifted the body to the couch in the sitting room, while the group looked on, appalled.

Then the officer shouldered the responsibility, drew his automatic, and marshaled them in a line on the farther side of the library from the hall door. Reporter Dottie Dills, hearing a commotion, came in from the hall and was promptly put in the line of suspects. By this time the women had recognized each other and were filling the air with shrill accusations.

"That woman's husband murdered my husband," declared the black-haired, fiery-eyed Lady Edgeworth as she pointed an accusing finger at the Parsons woman.

"Murder? Where's the murder?"

gasped Dottie Dills, producing pad and pencil.

Rosenstein and his assistant stared, dumfounded, at each other. The former's knees thumped together equally as fast as Monty's. The detainment was not welcomed by Shelley, who might have enjoyed seeing the mystery solved had his time not been so precious.

"That woman is an impostor," broke out the stunning blond Lady Edgeworth, designating the other Lady Edgeworth. "She's trying to rob me by using my name."

"Forgery!" excitedly murmured Dottie Dills without lifting her head from her scribbling.

"These women are trying to beat me out of the Crystal Ball diamond," asserted the small, overly powdered Nell, participator in his lordship's abundant crop of wild oats.

"Robbery!" again murmured Dottie Dills, who considered herself by all odds the luckiest reporter in the world. All save Shelley, who knew her mission, looked at her as if she was crazy, while she hurriedly turned her scoop into copy.

The women were all jabbering at once, each demanding that the officer arrest the other. He looked about helplessly at what he half believed were a bunch of idiots.

"Tell it to the judge," he bellowed gruffly. "Mr. Rosenstein, take this gun and cover the gang while I call the station."

As Rosenstein fearfully assumed control big Gus stepped importantly to the telephone. After trying repeatedly to get central he gave up in despair.

"The cussed thing's out of order," he told Rosenstein. "Go to the corner and call a patrol while I keep these crooks together."

Again Shelley shot Monty a silencing glance just in time to prevent him from explaining that the wires were discon-

nected. Rosenstein left in great haste, much relieved to get away from the hot-bed of crime. Dottie Dills wrote furiously, while the other captives looked deprecatingly at each other, all thinking they had been trapped.

"Gad, Vern," piped Monty, "are we going to be arrested?"

Shelley replied with only a nod as the officer turned to him. "A woman in every room and a dead Jap to boot," scoffed the latter, spitting through his scraggy mustache into the fireplace. "Thought you were in Utah, huh, young fellow?"

"I don't know any more about these people than you do," affirmed Shelley. "Like Monty here, I never saw any of them until to-night."

"Then why are they camping in your flat?"

"That one"—Shelley pointed at Laura Parsons—"came here selling encyclopedias, then the rest followed like sheep. All I know about them is just what they have told you, and I doubt whether half of that is true. There is a mystery somewhere connected with these Lady Edgeworths, officer, and I'm willing to do what I can to help you get at the bottom of it."

"Talks like an angel," spoke up Laura Parsons sarcastically. "Officer, he is to blame for all this muddle. I came here as an agent, and he proposed to me. Then he kept me here until he called the police. But, officer, I'm an innocent woman. Honest to God I am!"

"I've got my eye on him, miss," assured husky Gus with a confident wink.

"He kept me waiting here, too," added each of the other three in turn.

"And how about you?" said the officer to Dottie Dills.

She looked quickly up from her scribbling. "I came here to interview Mr. Shelley, but did not expect to find all this trouble."

"Reporter, ough?" blurted Gus. "Well, don't forget to mention that it

was Officer Murphy who made this haul. Guess we was both pretty lucky to drop in on such a big job."

For a while all were quiet. It seemed as if Rosenstein had had time to go several miles. Gus especially was getting anxious.

"Where did the dead man come from?" he asked, impatiently munching a cud of tobacco. "Who was he?"

Dottie Dills perked her ears for details and poised her pencil for action.

"Dead man!" she gasped under her breath. "Who's dead?"

"He was our servant," explained Shelley, stepping forward to lean on the table. "When I saw him last, just before you and Mr. Rosenstein came, he was in perfect health. So if he died of an unnatural cause, as seems evident, the murderer is in this room."

They all stared at him incredulously. He watched every changing face for some incriminating sign, but could detect none. Each prisoner scrutinized his or her neighbor from head to foot for traces of blood.

"Get back in line, young fellow!" ordered Gus. "I haven't forgot that you're clever."

Shelley complied willingly. Again all became silent until Monty, seeing a large automobile draw up outside, began to plead for clemency.

"Gad, officer, I'm innocent; I swear I am," he begged, his voice trembling like a doomed man's. "What can you arrest me for? I never broke a law in my life. Look at these clothes. If you're going to take me anywhere I've got to look presentable."

He started for his door, but was quickly recalled to line by a flourish of the officer's big blue-steel revolver. Even in the seriousness of the situation Shelley felt inclined to laugh at Monty's idea of dressing up to be arrested.

"Wouldn't I be a fine cop if I let you walk out?" jested the officer. "The judge won't mind meeting you in those

clothes. A lord and a man murdered, a wad of jewels stolen, and two women claiming to be the same person; guess that's enough to pull the whole gang for. By the way, who's got that box of jewelry?"

"The murderer of my husband," replied the melancholy, black-haired Lady Edgeworth.

"He's got it," corrected Laura Parsons, and pointed to Shelley, who at that moment had his hand on it in his pocket.

"Then he's the murderer of Lord Edgeworth," deduced the officer, taking out a pair of handcuffs and advancing toward Shelley. "Hand over the trinkets, young fellow."

Before Shelley could surrender the jewel case the Nell Somebody fainted limply into the arms of the big policeman. Her weight and his astonishment combined caused him to lose aim long enough for Shelley to extract from the table drawer an old muzzle-loading revolver which, although it had not been loaded for years, served the purpose admirably in working a bluff.

By the time the confused officer extricated himself from the embrace of the swooning woman he beheld Shelley's pistol staring him in the face. Nell Somebody lay unconscious across the arm of a large leather chair. Before any one fully realized what had happened, the new conquerer stood in the foreground, covering the submissive group with his unloaded weapon.

"Don't raise that gun!" he ordered the officer. "I'll have to bother you to drop it and take my place in line. The quicker the better. That's it."

For a second the new prisoner looked dazed; then, seeing the young man's earnestness, he sullenly obeyed. At once Shelley appropriated the officer's six-shooter, and, after exhibiting the empty chambers, laid the old one aside. He took a seat, poised the revolver on his knee, and commissioned Monty to

get the smelling salts and attend to casualties.

Now that he had control of the motley crew of strangers, Shelley hardly knew how to get them off his hands or how to welcome the patrol full of bluecoats which Rosenstein had gone for.

A tower clock struck eleven, and neither Rosenstein nor the police patrol had yet appeared. Monty was still engaged in fanning Nell and applying cold towels to her head. As the officer began to feel the ignominy of surrendering his pistol to an unarmed man, his Irish temper rose and he came fearlessly toward his subduer.

"Do you think you can get away with this monkey business?" he blurted out. "I'd be a fine cop if I stood for it."

"Well, what do you think you will do about it?" taunted Shelley, taking a careful aim at the rebellious officer. "Step back in line before I forget that I'm not target practicing and pull the trigger."

Without arguing, he did as he was bidden, and did it very quickly. As soon as he was quieted the women began to show signs of mutiny.

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Laura Parson uneasily. "Don't give us to the police. We haven't done anything to you."

"Yes, you have," contradicted Shelley, speaking to them all. "You've murdered our servant Toyo. And whoever did it had just as well say so, because I'm going to keep you here until I find out."

Except for Nell's occasional groans, there was complete silence. Evidently no one was in a confessing mood.

"You won't be boss here long," grunted the officer, still smarting with shame. "A wagonload of cops will be here soon, and it won't look good for you when the murdered lord's jewels are found on you."

"I told you it would bring bad luck,"

pipied Monty unthinkingly as he administered another wet towel.

Having something else on his mind, Shelley ignored the utterance. "Since none of you will admit the crime," he said very seriously, "tell me, Mrs. Parsons, where is your husband, the English army officer who gave you the Crystal Ball?"

This bit of enlightenment brought consternation. All eyes turned on Laura Parsons.

"I'm not married," she contradicted him firmly. "I never knew an army officer in my life."

"You told me not three hours ago that you were married to a man in the army," he reminded her. "Now which time were you telling the truth?" She remained silent and ill at ease. "Well, tell me this," he persisted; "were you ever employed as a maid by Lord Edgeworth's wife?"

She started forward, then controlled herself with indignant cunning. "Why should you know my full history?"

"Because it is important," he replied. "I'm determined to clear this thing up if it takes all night, so you people had just as well sit down and make yourselves comfortable. You are my guests and you will continue to be until one of you decides to open up and give me some information. There are two things I'm going to find out—where Mrs. Parsons' husband is and what happened to our servant."

"So long as you have the Crystal Ball," interceded Laura Parsons craftily, "what does it matter whether or not I have a husband?"

"Nevertheless, I intend to find him," affirmed Shelley; "and the sooner you tell me where he is the better. And you"—he turned to the dark-haired Lady Edgeworth—"you couldn't possibly have been in the same room with Toyo without knowing something about his death."

"I can tell you nothing about it," said the accused lady reticently.

"If you did not have a hand in it why this secrecy?" persisted Shelley.

She adroitly centered her attentions upon the contents of her mesh bag as though she had not heard him. He took time to think by leisurely changing his position. This mysterious situation could not detain him much longer, he figured. With such a bunch of women the facts were bound to leak out soon. His only means of learning the secret of the Crystal Ball and the truth about Toyo's curious death was watchful and inquisitive waiting; at least, so he determined.

From their faces he could ascertain nothing. Every one wore a strained expression, but none revealed more guilt than the others. The big officer, whose hot-tempered red face, behind the scraggy black mustache, faintly resembled a sunset through a brush pile, sprang to his feet and towered menacingly over Shelley, but could do nothing.

"Do you know what you've done? Do you?" he sputtered angrily. "You've spoiled the biggest haul I ever came near making, and knocked me out of a chance for captain stripes; that's what you've done."

"You would make a pretty captain," put in Laura Parsons, who also was in an argumentative mood. "Anybody who would let an unarmed man take his revolver away from him is a disgrace to the force. You have let us fall into the hands of a murderer. Your cowardice has put us at his mercy. A fine captain you'd make!"

This time it was the officer's turn to quail. He became as meek as a suckling lamb. Shelley only smiled at being referred to as a murderer. In the hope of catching a clew he chose to let them do the talking rather than proclaim his innocence.

"You can blame no one but yourself,"

spoke up the black-haired Lady Edgeworth, accusing Laura Parsons. "The officer may be at fault, but you are responsible for this whole entanglement. You and your husband, wherever he may be, brought it all about by murdering Lord Edgeworth, my own dear husband. And I seek revenge for every drop of his blood."

Instead of cringing, Laura Parsons turned pale with fear. She opened her dry lips to speak, but was interrupted by the blond Lady Edgeworth.

"Your own dear husband," she mocked with a sarcastic laugh. "Lord Edgeworth never had but one wife, and I am that one. You are an impostor and a blackmailer. Don't think for a minute that you can assume my name and get his fortune. It belongs to me, and I will have it."

This assertion caused the revived Nell to sit up quickly. "But the Crystal Ball necklace belongs to me," she proclaimed, exhibiting her letter from the late Lord Edgeworth. "He gave it to me. I have his promise in writing, so, you see, I am not a fake."

The colorless face of the black-haired Lady Edgeworth became livid. "Who are you?" she demanded abruptly.

"I was a friend of your husband's—a very good friend," replied the other. "He and I were pals for over a year. Read the letter. It says he cared more for me than any woman on earth. That's why he promised me the jewels. I came for them the moment I heard of his death."

After finishing reading, the black-haired Lady Edgeworth eyed the Nell woman fiercely. "I believe you are lying," she breathed between clenched teeth as she fought back her tears. "My husband could never have written such a disgusting, sickening letter. He made no promiscuous friendships. You have concocted this scheme and imitated his writing."

"It's a lie," cried the other woman, with her voice pitched high. "And I'll prove it; I'll prove it."

"Now, now," calmed Shelley, rather puzzled at the queer characters. "Let's not squabble. It's a very interesting little argument, but you aren't getting anywhere. Too much of a bluffing contest. His lordship seems to have been a great ladies' man. Now I have a suggestion to make. Since all of you wives and women can't have his treasure, suppose you divide the small jewels and toss a coin to decide who shall have the Crystal Ball."

To this proposition there rose a chorus of objections. As he drew the morocco case from his pocket and held its contents up to the gaze of the women they started forward, entranced and fascinated. Even the soured officer sat up and took notice.

"So that's what's causing all the rumpus, ugh!" he grunted. "Some sparkler! It beats me how women lose their heads over jewelry. Show that necklace to a woman and she'll go crazy as a loon and murder anybody to get her hands on it."

Here the philosophizing officer was interrupted by the doorbell. Shelley sprang up and pulled the hall doorway curtains together, then delegated Monty to see who was calling at this late hour. It proved to be only another telegram bearing the unwelcome news that his aged aunt had suffered a relapse and was sinking rapidly. This put him in a quandary. He had not forgotten that he needed money most of all; but was he to get it by sticking here in quest of the reward for Lord Edgeworth's slayer, or by finding a wife and inheriting his aunt's estate? It took him only a moment to decide that the latter course seemed the safer.

"Monty," he said, planning as he spoke, "I don't know how I would have gotten along without you to-night. Now I'm going to ask another favor of you

My aunt is worse, and I've got to find a wife."

"I'd be glad to do it, old man, but I don't know where there are any," complained Monty.

Shelley smiled, half at Monty and half at the puzzled faces of the rest of his auditors. "Leave that to me," he said, proffering Monty his revolver. "What I want you to do is to take this gun and keep this bunch of guests here while I go to get married. Also look after the apartment and call the coroner to investigate Toyo's death."

Monty tottered. "Me?" he asked, his voice trembling. "I swear, Vern, I don't know a blooming thing about a weapon. I'd be more likely to shoot myself than my assailant. I'm afraid, old man, you'll have to arrange it some other way."

"There is no other way," declared Shelley, giving him a bracing blow on the back. "I guess you can last an hour anyway. All you have to do is just sit here with it aimed like this, and if any of them start anything let go. Above all, don't go to sleep."

With a shaking hand Monty accepted the pistol and took his position as guard. The officer, who little fancied the idea of being detained, jumped to his feet to protest.

"It's a raw deal!" he bellowed with accompanying gestures.

"Might be worse," sympathized Shelley hurriedly. "Luck to you, Monty. You'll hear from me after the smoke has cleared away."

Snatching up hat and coat, he passed out of the apartment and down the corridor. Before he got outside the building a muffled report of a pistol shot reached his ears. Then followed several faint screams and the slamming of a door. Instantly he turned and ran back.

After hearing the shot and commotion, Shelley was almost afraid to enter the library. He could not help but pic-

ture the room as a scene of carnage, with poor Monty drenched in a pool of blood. So he was not surprised at what he found, except that he expected to see one of the men in charge.

As he entered on the run he was stopped short by the commanding voice of the black-haired Lady Edgeworth, who, covering him with her dainty, pearl-handled revolver, ordered him into line. After obeying, he looked about him at the terror written on every face, especially on that of the lady with the weapon. Again Nell had collapsed in a faint. The room still smelled of powder smoke, and over against the wall, face down, lay the dead body of Laura Parsons.

"What does this mean?" he asked, displeased at having his apartment turned into a morgue.

"It means," replied the black-haired Lady Edgeworth, her eyes flashing desperately, "that I have killed my maid, who, together with her husband, murdered my husband for the Crystal Ball necklace. It is my revenge, and when I find her accomplice he shall suffer the same penalty."

"Where is my friend Monty, the fellow I left in charge here?" inquired Shelley, looking for him in vain.

"Here I am, Vern," called a voice from the closet. "Don't worry about me, old man; I wasn't hit. But, gad, I had a close call!"

The speaker's cheerfulness gave every evidence that he was thankful to be alive and out of the danger zone. After falling from power his conqueror had locked him in the closet like a naughty child.

"Monty, we've played the devil," said Shelley, looking sadly at the lifeless form of the encyclopedia agent. "The place looks like a battlefield."

"I told you that deuced stone would bring us bad luck," Monty reminded him through the keyhole. "For Heaven's sake, Vern, get rid of them!"

Just then the officer started to pick up the automatic which had been dropped in fright by the closeted one. "Madam," he said, "I'll take this gang off your hands now. You'll have to come along, too, and tell 'em your reasons for shooting the girl. It's my duty as an officer."

"Don't move or I will fire!" she commanded with calm determination. "You have already shown your ability as a guard."

Needless to say, the officer did not move an eyelid. The lady in black then turned to Shelley, and without any questions demanded the necklace. After he had complied she went to the window, with her face always toward the group, and raised and lowered the shade three times as a code signal to her assistants outside.

While waiting for them Nell again revived enough to sit up and look about dazedly. She could not comprehend the situation at all, and nearly wilted again. Her first words were: "Where am I? Has there been an accident?"

"More of a riot I'd call it," explained Shelley. "Two dead and none injured. You'll read it all in the morning papers."

"Dead!" she gasped, terror-stricken. "What killed them? Who are all these people?"

"No friends of mine," assured Shelley, watching the clock begrudgingly and thinking of his aunt's condition. "All I know about this whole mysterious affair is that we are fortunate to be among the living. You fainted just at the right time, Nell."

She rose with insulted dignity.

"Be seated!" ordered the somber Lady Edgeworth, causing a shriek by pointing the revolver at her. "Wait until my detectives come."

However, her detectives were not the next to arrive. About four minutes later, to be exact, a rather shabby, grizzled fellow appeared in the hall door-

way. A cap was pulled low over his eyes and a roll-neck sweater completely concealed the lower portion of his face. When he beheld the officer his nerves slightly wavered. With a hunted look he watched the front door incessantly, a pistol leveled in his steady right hand.

"Drop it!" he commanded the lady with the pearl-handled weapon, whose back was turned. Then, without losing a moment, he stepped swiftly and boldly into the room. His group of subjects were stunned. Even Dottie Dills, she of the *Star*, dropped pad and pencil to stare with open mouth. In all his years of beat walking Officer Murphy had only dreamed of such experiences as these.

"Quick, who lives here?" the stranger asked.

"I do," answered Shelley. "What may I do for you?"

"Tell me where my wife is," spoke the fellow rapidly, as if hard pressed for time. "She came here this afternoon and I haven't seen her since."

Before Shelley could tell him that he knew nothing about his wife the fellow noticed the figure lying on the floor in the corner. Dropping to his knees beside it, he looked into the face of Laura Parsons.

"My God! It's my Laura," he muttered, discarding his pistol and shaking her. "Speak to me, little wife. Oh, my little Laura!"

His weak voice and thin hands trembled. Any of the others could have easily seized his weapon, but they remained like statues, glued to their chairs.

"Who did this?" he demanded with fierce eyes. "Tell me, where's the cur? Somebody's got to pay; I'll make them."

At that moment some one passed down the outside hallway. The stranger paled and crouched behind a chair.

"Hide me," he whispered, shaking with fright. "They're after me for a

murder I never heard of—some fool Englishman I never saw. Quick, man, hide me for justice's sake."

The listeners looked aghast at him. Their brains were in a hopeless muddle.

"What are you so frightened about?" Shelley asked. "If you are innocent stand up like a man and tell them so."

"Hide me and I'll reward you," pleaded the stranger, extending something sparkling in the palm of his hand. "Here's a jewel known as the Crystal Ball. It's worth a fortune. Hide me quick and you can have it."

Still more were the listeners aghast. Shelley refused to touch it. The lady in black took out her treasure and looked at it to see if she could be seeing double.

"I know who you are," she said fearlessly. "You were Lord Edgeworth's valet and disappeared with your wife on the night he was killed. Where did you get that diamond? There was only one such stone."

"Mine is the original and yours is an imitation," he boasted, forgetting himself. Then in humbleness he turned to Shelley: "Take it and hide me, will you? Or have I got to force you?"

The outer door having remained open ever since Shelley returned on the run, the supposedly dead Lord Edgeworth entered unheard. He was an angular, monocled Englishman with a leisurely stride, a flexible bamboo cane, and a cigarette. At the sight of him the stranger dropped his weapon in amazement. The others drew back with the feeling that they were looking at a dead man's ghost.

"What a jolly queer little gathering!" he exclaimed with an English drawl. "Is my wife hereabouts?"

After hesitating a moment she threw herself into his arms, while the blond adventuress and the overly powdered Nell exchanged hopeless glances.

"Why, dear, I thought you were mur-

dered," sobbed Lady Edgeworth. "Look, I have even bought mourning clothes. Where on earth have you been?"

"At the club," he responded calmly. "I have been to your rooms for you several times, but you were never there, you know."

"But why did all the servants leave at the same time, and what became of the Crystal Ball necklace?" she asked in one breath. "I thought surely you had been murdered or robbed."

"I lost heavily at cards," he explained briefly, "and had to pawn the jewels. I also discharged the servants to cut expenses."

"Why did you leave in the middle of the night?" she next wanted to know.

"Aw, I'm tired of lying," he laughed, suddenly dropping his English accent as a distant tower clock struck twelve. "The time is up. Let Dolly explain the rest."

As the clock finished striking, Dolly, her face radiant with a mischievous smile, rushed in from the hall where the Englishman had left her waiting for the appointed time.

"It's midnight," she announced, her bright eyes dancing. "So you may all remove your disguise."

Immediately wigs, mustaches, grease point, and talcum powder were removed amid laughter and chatter. The Peerless' new vampire, alias Laura Parsons, the encyclopedia agent, and Toyo came to life without the least difficulty. The blank cartridges were removed from the revolvers, and the impromptu melodrama was over. Without their make-ups Shelley immediately recognized the women as studio friends of Dolly's. Lord Edgeworth was Roy Hedges, the Peerless villain, and his murderer was a Peerless camera man in real life.

Rosenstein drifted in behind Dolly, who had held him prisoner since going for the police patrol.

"Gad, Vern, what's the excitement?"

called Monty's voice from the closet, where he had been forgotten. "Give me air."

He came forth, blinking at the light, and all joined in the laughter except Rosenstein, the officer, and Dottie Dills, whose story had suddenly switched from tragedy to farce. Shelley still had a puzzled look as he surveyed the variegated lot.

"Well, where did you get all this Crystal Ball business?" he asked.

"It's a play that Roy wrote last year for the Allied War Fund Bazaar," explained Dolly, laughing at him. "When I learned that my Peerless contract would expire at midnight I began to think of some way to keep you here unmarried until then because I really *did* not want you to marry. And I *knew* the only way was to make you forget your fortune. So we decided to act the Crystal Ball here just as we

acted it at the bazaar, and even bribed Toyo to play dead for us."

Rosenstein, the moving-picture magnate, scribbled something and handed it to his valued actor and director, Roy Hedges. "This is for the moving-picture rights to your Crystal Ball, Hedges. It's great. Deliver the scenario at once."

"I will," bargained Hedges, "with the understanding that you renew Shelley's five-year contract to continue starring at his former salary."

Rosenstein consented, remarking that "beezness is beezness."

If you happen to have seen the Crystal Ball on the screen, with Vernon Shelley and Dolly Cameron starring, you probably noticed that their ten-foot close-up kiss, which faded into "The End" was a genuine, eighteen-karat honeymooner's caress, instead of the usual cut-and-dried stage business.



HIDDEN PATHWAYS

By Albert Owens

NOW that we part let love say everything,
 Still all the troubled whispers and despair.
 We have possessed a dream . . . what do we care
 For any aftermath of questioning?
 Ah! let us join our frail, frail hands and sing . . .
 Illusions are but bubbles filled with air
 That burst like voiceless music when we dare
 To sound the depths of life's dull muttering.

And let these roses by our yesterdays,
 Each one a single, crimson flash of light,
 For love is always free, it only stays
 In all the speed and splendor of its flight
 With those who go upon their separate ways
 Along the hidden pathways of the night.

Tales of The Double Man

By
Clyde Broadwell



II.—Death by Duplicate

Being a further account of the marvelous experiences of "The Double Man," as detailed by Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale, world-renowned psychic expert and fellow of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research. Doctor Dale's manuscript being much too technical for other than scientific minds to understand, he has consented to Mr. Broadwell's simpler presentation of his thesis in the columns of THE THRILL BOOK.—EDITOR.

ARE William Gray and Arthur Wadleigh—eight thousand miles apart—actually ONE MAN?

I, Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale, fellow of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research, hesitate to submit my weird thesis to the world, lest I be considered bereft of reason.

The world, however, knows now, since the original story of "The Double Man" was unfolded in barest outline and without detail in THE THRILL BOOK's issue preceding this, that science thus far stands baffled before this mystery. It is in hope of rousing my fellow scientists to interest themselves more deeply in the matter that I venture, not without trepidation, to permit publication of my observations. I am, as yet, unable to offer to the world

any conclusions in the premises or any explanations of the phenomena I have witnessed.

It will be recalled by the many thousands of persons who read the story of "The Double Man" in THE THRILL BOOK that whenever William Gray, a stockbroker in Wall Street, fell asleep in New York he immediately would awaken as Arthur Wadleigh, representative of the London Ivory Company, in Cape Town, British South Africa, eight thousand miles away.

Conversely, whenever he would fall asleep as Wadleigh he would awaken immediately as William Gray, in New York.

Physically and mentally fatigued, both Wadleigh and Gray resorted to morphine to deaden their occult sorrows, and finally both were committed

to insane asylums, Gray in New York and Wadleigh in Cape Town.

Scientists of two continents—I might say of the whole world—were startled by the haunting mystery of the case, as only one ever before had been recorded. But this record was so obscure and vague that it helped little in solving the Wadleigh-Gray and Gray-Wadleigh daily intertransmigrations. However, that the reader may have as full and comprehensive an insight as myself into the matter, I shall briefly cite the circumstances of that other nebulous record from ancient days.

Six thousand years ago, in Egypt, that land of mysticism and unfathomed wonders, two of the reigning Pharaoh's favorite nobles were stricken with similar inexplicable intertransmigrations, until they also, like Mr. Gray and Mr. Wadleigh, became insane and died simultaneously.

The ancient records of the Egyptian priesthood, discovered by that eminent scientific explorer, Doctor Bradford Wells-Durand, set forth that this rare conjunction of souls in two bodies recurs but once every six thousand years. It would seem that their prophecy was true, although how they could have known baffles Doctor Bradford Wells-Durand and myself. Nevertheless, they knew. We wonder at the pyramids and how they could have been built in that ancient day. Nevertheless, they were built, and still remain a mystery to science.

The records also reveal that every effort was made to discover the mystic occult link which made one entity of two men with two souls and two bodies, living far apart from one another. In the ancient papyrus record the distance between the two Egyptians was put at some four hundred miles. In the case of Wadleigh-Gray the distance is twenty times as great. Nevertheless, the transition of souls is instantaneous,

as we have ascertained by careful comparisons of the time—myself and my scientific confrères in Cape Town—upon each manifestation of the varying phases in this riddle of soul-and-body doubles.

By their great art the priests of that remote day sought, but in vain, to sever this link of destiny which bound two men's souls more firmly together spiritually than the Siamese twins were bound physically.

And now, six thousand years afterward, modern science likewise is seeking—so far in vain—for that super-human link—or is it a human link?—the severance of which alone will bring peace and happiness and health to "The Double Man."

Among the scientists in Cape Town who are delving deeply into this modern fulfillment of the ancient prophecy is Doctor Lucien Trebaux, the renowned French authority on psychic and occult manifestations. He is assisted there by Doctor Philip Spaulding, who has attended Mr. Arthur Wadleigh since his mystic intertransmigrations began with my patient, Mr. William Gray.

I find Mr. Gray's personal physician, Doctor Marvin Porter, of incalculable assistance in my study of this absorbing mystery, as he attended Mr. Gray from the first manifestations of a human duplication with Mr. Wadleigh in Cape Town.

And now, to the subject—or subjects, as I should say—to which the eyes of the scientific world are turned.

When Mr. Gray was taken to the psychopathic ward in Bellevue Hospital I was called in to make a diagnosis of his case. I found him suffering from the effects of morphine, which he had used in doses far in excess of any taken by patients I previously had treated. Normally, this should have killed him. I was amazed to find him alive.

His pulse and temperature, together

with his respiration, were so reduced as to be barely discernible. When I first saw him I believed him dead; but, of course, this was disproved upon thorough examination. Indeed, many persons have been given up for dead and have been buried when a more thorough examination would have spared them the nameless horrors of a living entombment.

Gray's body at first glance and test, as I have said, exhibited all the symptoms of *rigor mortis*.

Not until I brought my best stethoscope into play—and here I wish to interpolate a vigorous protest against the many defective stethoscopes now being used by members of my profession and whose faulty instruments have been the cause of many a person's burial alive while in a state of suspended animation—not until I brought my best, my most trustworthy stethoscope into play, I say, was it possible for me to contradict the evidence of my eyes and sense of feeling.

I took every possible means to resuscitate Mr. Gray from his lethargic sleep, which I ascribe to a modified degree of suspended animation superinduced by semiparalysis of the nerves through excessive morphine addiction. Not until the third day did I succeed in restoring him to consciousness.

His first words on waking were:

"Send to Natal for the ivory now ready for shipment."

Five minutes later he querulously inquired:

"What's the quotation on C., B. & Q.?"

Apparently, at the moment of waking, his spirit had returned from its mystic transmigration into the body of Mr. Wadleigh, in Cape Town, and in his physically and mentally weakened condition, Mr. Gray had not been able immediately to throw off the Wadleigh influence. Else, I reasoned, his first

remark would have been one referring to the stock market.

Inasmuch as my eight-thousand-miles-distant confrère in Cape Town and myself had arranged for immediate radio communication concerning any important developments at either end of this complex problem, I sent the details to Doctor Lucien Trebaux, quoting Mr. Gray's waking words and the intervals between each remark of my patient. The return dispatch from Cape Town more than startled me.

I insert here Doctor Trebaux's reply radiogram to me in New York, translated from the code:

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE, New York.

At exactly the moment Mr. Gray awoke in New York, Mr. Wadleigh, here in Cape Town, who had been awake for a few minutes, fell into a sleep so profound and so closely resembling death that only the most minute examination proved him alive. I was about to radio you his words upon his awaking prior to the sudden relapse into slumber, when your radio arrived. Mr. Wadleigh's words were exactly the same as Mr. Gray's, but reversed; that is to say, his first waking sentence was: "What's the quotation on C., B. & Q.?" His second sentence was: "Send to Natal for the ivory now ready for shipment." The first sentence was Mr. Gray's second, and the second was Mr. Gray's first. It is indeed mysterious. I would have expected Mr. Wadleigh to have spoken first of ivory, but it was apparent that he had not immediately shaken off the effects of his soul transmigration into Mr. Gray's body. We must keep in constant touch by radio if we hope to unravel the tangled skein which Fate has woven between the souls of our unfortunate patients.

DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX.

As I said before, this message so astounded me and my fellow watchers at the bedside of Mr. Gray that in the ensuing discussion we entirely neglected to maintain a vigil on Mr. Gray's condition for any sudden or abnormal changes.

For fully half an hour he lay thus unobserved, and I must confess to a sense of deep personal humiliation that I should have been so startled out of

my usual scientific poise as thus to have forgotten my heavy burden of obligation to science and posterity. But withal I doubt if ever before such a phenomenon—such a miracle, I might term it—confronted a scientist.

Imagine my chagrin and that of my cowatchers at Mr. Gray's bedside when we turned and beheld him again plunged into deepest sleep.

Shortly afterward came this radiogram from Doctor Lucien Trebeaux in Cape Town:

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE, New York.

At seven-thirty-five p. m., an interval of thirty-two and one-half minutes, Mr. Wadleigh awakened suddenly and sat up in bed, staring perplexedly about the room. I asked him if he wished anything, but he shook his head in the negative. His eyes seemed to hold a dread of something horrible or fearful. Then he muttered: "It's William Gray or me. Who'll be the one?" When I asked him what these mysterious words meant, he did not answer. But a look of ferocity dawned in his eyes, so vindictive and determined that I was startled. I can only conjecture that these two men, with mental visions made keener by insanity, have learned that the one who survives the other, if by a fraction of a second only, will continue to live and become normal again. However, this is merely conjecture. I can feel a crisis approaching in this weird duel of souls, and I wonder if Mr. Wadleigh or his duplicate self, Mr. Gray, will survive the other, or if they must die simultaneously, as in the case of the two ancient Egyptians. I would strongly advise the most rigid vigils at your end of the riddle from this time on. Mr. Wadleigh begins to show signs of relapsing into sleep. I shall further advise you, and in the meantime, at this end, shall continue constantly on the alert for any new developments in this puzzle of the ages.

DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX.

Naturally enough, my assistants and myself redoubled our vigilance at Mr. Gray's bedside.

We were rewarded soon afterward by noticing subtle changes in the face of the sleeper. An expression of fear was followed by one of anger, then of deep purpose, anon of sullen hatred, and then—great heavens!—Mr. Gray

suddenly awakened and sat up in bed, exclaiming with ghoulish triumph:

"Wadleigh's dead! Wadleigh's dead!"

I consulted my watch, and noted the exact moment he made this weird declaration concerning the death of his other self in far-off Africa. The hands pointed exactly to eleven a. m.

Doctor Marvin Porter hastened out to radio this startling intelligence to Doctor Trebeaux, in Cape Town, when he was intercepted by a messenger hastening in with a radio from Doctor Trebeaux himself.

With fingers actually trembling in nervousness, I opened the dispatch, to read, after laborious code translation, the following:

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE, New York.

Mr. Wadleigh died suddenly at what in New York would be eleven a. m. Would have flashed sooner, except that radio service was crippled by some mechanical defect, and has just been restored to operation.

DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX.

Gray had been right, then! Wadleigh was dead—had died at the exact moment Mr. Gray said he had died! What could be the explanation? As though to thwart me, Mr. Gray, thoroughly exhausted, fell back upon his pillow, unconscious. Fearing some untoward developments might result if he were not immediately resuscitated, I diligently set to work at that task, aided by Doctor Porter.

Half an hour later Mr. Gray opened his eyes and gazed up at me. The weird look of the insane was gone from them, I noticed, and his heart action and respiration were more nearly normal than they had been since his collapse.

The strenuous efforts I had made to revive him, including certain vigorous osteopathic methods, had caused me to perspire freely, and some drops of moisture fell from my brow upon his face. I wiped them away with my handkerchief.

"How do you feel, Mr. Gray?" I inquired.

"Weak—very weak," he whispered. "Have I been ill?"

"Rather. You must rest now. Are you sleepy?"

"No—just tired. I've had an awful nightmare."

"Are you strong enough to tell me of it?"

"Yes. You are aware of my strange double entity?"

I nodded.

"Well, I guess that's all done for now."

"Done for?" I asked, amazed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that Mr. Wadleigh, my other self in Cape Town, is dead."

"How do you know?"

"I don't—except that what I call my 'nightmare' proved it to me."

"Proceed," I told him.

"In the weird intertransmigration of our souls—mine to Wadleigh's body, his to my body—we both somehow learned that one of us must die if the other were to live. The question was, which one of us would be the survivor? Upon my soul—as upon his—dawned the realization that to-day's flight across eight thousand miles of space would be the last for one of us—perhaps for both of us. I remember it all. It was awful!"

Mr. Gray shuddered, and his expression betokened unearthly horror. I greatly feared he was overtaxing his strength, and implored him to rest a while. But he insisted he was strong enough to continue his revelation.

Fearing he might die before the world would learn his story, I permitted him to continue, which he did as follows:

"In all the intertransmigrations that I underwent I always was subtly conscious of passing en route the spirit of Mr. Wadleigh, winging its way to my unconscious body in New York. Each

such flight seemed endlessly long, a matter of æons, yet I know none endured for more than a fractional part of a second, as, allowing always for difference in time, the clocks in Wadleigh's Cape Town and my New York rooms showed on their respective dials exactly the same hour, the same minute, and, I almost could swear, the same second.

"Always, in these flights, my soul ears could detect the myriad messages passing in the outer areas of ethereal space from spirit to spirit, and intermingled with them I could detect the harsher stridency of the, to human ears noiseless, but to my soul ears clanging, notes of the radiograms sent from wireless station to wireless station, carrying the messages of mortals from place to place.

"Once, on these flights, I actually was delayed by coming into contact with the nebulous shade of one who told me in spirit voice that he was Napoleon I., and who demanded an apology from me for colliding with him in space. This may sound absurd and uncanny, but it is as true as that I am speaking to you, a stranger, Doctor —Doctor —"

"Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale," I said, thus introducing myself to Mr. Gray.

"Glad to know you, Doctor Dale," he said. "I've often heard of you and your wonderful researches in the occult field. You don't think I'm crazy, do you, doctor?" His voice was anxious.

"Not at all!" I said heartily, although, to be frank, I actually believed him still in a stage of mental abnormality.

It seemed too ridiculous to believe that this Wall Street broker could be sane, prating thus of spiritual encounters with the shade of Napoleon, hearing voices in the heavenly voids, and being able to distinguish the sounds of the wireless-message tickings in space! Nevertheless, I am too much of a sci-

entist to scout entirely or disbelieve statements merely because they may sound insane, unreasonable, far-fetched, or beyond the realms of possibility. I have seen too many instances of the impossible becoming the reality, the improbable becoming the possible, to be entirely skeptical. Consequently, as I was anxious to hear more of this romantic tale from Mr. Gray, I urged him to continue. He seemed very greatly relieved, and resumed:

"I had no time to talk to Napoleon, as some mystic force was pulling me straight through the emperor's shade toward my other body—that of Mr. Wadleigh—in Cape Town. I know that I tried to mumble an apology, but I guess Napoleon never heard it.

"One of the peculiar features of my arrival at, or departure from, either my body or that of Mr. Wadleigh was that I never experienced other than a slight sensation of vibration.

"When the flight took place which I heard whispered by those mysterious voices in space was to be the last between myself and Wadleigh, I determined that Wadleigh must not 'beat me to it,' as we say in the New York vernacular, or I would be the one to perish. A man must live, doctor, and I hanker to be alive as William Gray, rather than as Arthur Wadleigh.

"I therefore concentrated all my soul power upon meeting his shade more than halfway—outspeed him, if by the barest fraction of a second only—and so I forced myself, being then in Wadleigh's body awake, to go to sleep. Then I propelled myself with instantaneous power through the ethereal realm into my own body here in New York. I passed Wadleigh's soul when it was but two-fifths of the way toward his own body in Cape Town, and so I awakened here, and remember that I then told you Wadleigh was dead.

"This is all that I know, except that I would like to have you prevent the

embalming of Mr. Wadleigh's body, so that should he be not actually dead he will have a chance to come back from the tomb to normal human estate, if science can disentangle our souls. I suppose some of my turbulent emotions in the soulful estate and struggle for supremacy in that last flight must have been reflected in my face. Were they?"

I told Mr. Gray of the demoniacal expressions I had seen in his countenance, and also reported Doctor Lucien Trebaux's radio report concerning the same contortions witnessed in the face of Mr. Wadleigh, eight thousand miles away.

"Why is this curse visited on us—on me, I mean?" asked Gray mournfully. "Some day, if I live through this hellish experience, I shall write some memoirs that will astound the world, especially concerning the remarkable tangles into which my love affairs have been muddled by this intertransmigration. I presume you will give to the world the story of my doubled-up existence?"

I told Mr. Gray that his story, written by himself, had been given already to the world through the popular columns of *THE THRILL BOOK* by Mr. Clyde M. Broadwell, who discovered the papers left by Mr. Gray among other effects in his Wall Street office.

"Then I shall have Mr. Broadwell write my story," said Mr. Gray. "Being in touch with you——"

"He is handling my thesis on your case," I told Gray. "It will be couched in terms too technical for the average mind untrained in the meaning of scientific terms, so he kindly offered himself as the medium between me and the public."

"Then I shall tell him my story—if I live to tell it."

"You'll live," I assured him. "Keep up your strength and try to sleep a little now." I left Gray, myself thoroughly fatigued by my long vigils.

When, some eight hours later, I re-

turned to Mr. Gray's bedside to relieve Doctor Marvin Porter, I found Gray still wide awake. Eight hours later he still was awake and displayed no indications of sleepiness beyond yawns and a tired, drawn look in his features.

In the interim had come a radiogram from Doctor Lucien Treboux concerning Mr. Wadleigh. The message will explain more lucidly and at less length than it would require for me to detail the new dénouements in this uncanny drama of two continents. I append it here:

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE, New York.

Mr. Wadleigh, *although dead*, so far as human-made instruments can determine death, *still has the appearance of a living man!*

Acting upon your cable, citing Mr. Gray's statements to you, I prevented the embalming of Mr. Wadleigh's body, although this is contrary to the law in Cape Town. Ordinarily, in this hot climate, a dead body would enter the processes of dissolution and decomposition within two hours after death. But Mr. Wadleigh's body, nearly a day after his demise, still shows no slightest sign or trace of decomposition or disintegration. We cannot do aught here than issue a burial certificate. I shall have his body placed in a mausoleum, instead of in the usual earth grave, so that should science have proved at fault in this case which confounds science, we at least can disentomb the body at any needful stage—unless Wadleigh actually be dead and decomposition later sets in. Matters now seem to be in what I may term a condition of "status quo." I marvel with you at the inexplicable features of this most astounding upsetting of all human facts and scientific theories.

DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX.

This message I read to Mr. Gray. He expressed deep relief, and also voiced his gratitude for my conveyance to Doctor Treboux of all the circumstances at the New York end of this unbelievable yet actually authentic anomaly.

I counseled Mr. Gray to sleep and rest, just as I had counseled him sixteen hours earlier. He met my advice with this unexpected declaration:

"I can't sleep! I want to, but I can't! Somehow, ever since Wadleigh died, sleep shuns me. I believe my soul attempts constant flights through space to enter his body, but is repelled because his spirit is either flown and he is dead physically, or because his soul is dormant and unresponsive, and thus is unable to rise to wakefulness no matter how mine may seek entrance to his body. If the latter is the case, *I suppose he'll awake some day*. If the former is true, *I'll never sleep naturally again. I know it! I feel it! I actually believe I'll die awake.*"

Here was a new problem. I could not permit Mr. Gray to die from wakefulness caused by the death of his other self. Such a proxy death never before was recorded. In this regard, the Gray-Wadleigh case differed from that ancient record of the two Egyptians, who, it will be remembered, died simultaneously.

After sending a radio to Doctor Treboux concerning this new dilemma, I administered an opiate to Mr. Gray and waited until the patient fell into a deep but unnatural and uneasy sleep. For half an hour after he closed his eyes I watched his face for any signs that might help me toward the solution of this baffling mystery.

Then, having made copious notes, I was glad to be relieved by Doctor Porter, to whom I explained all the latest developments in the case. This was our custom. When I returned, after a refreshing slumber, Doctor Porter informed me that he had jotted down some wild, disjointed words spoken by Mr. Gray in his sleep. I read Doctor Porter's notes. Here they are, verbatim, and in the order spoken by Mr. Gray:

"Elaine! Oh, Elaine!"

"I'm not sleeping—oh!—dead—dead—no, not dead!"

"Erla—forgive—don't know half I'm saying—dawn!"

“Spirits—spirits—gray—cold—oh-h!”

“Enter—can’t enter—ugh-h!”

I puzzled over these cryptic utterances after Doctor Porter went. “Elaine” and “Erla” were names of girls. I had learned that Mr. Gray had been engaged to Miss Erla Kingsley, of Manhattan, but that the engagement had been broken off when he was committed to the psychopathic ward in Bellevue Hospital. But of an “Elaine” I never had heard.

Mr. Gray’s other expressions, “not sleeping—dead—not dead—spirits—gray—cold—enter—can’t enter—dawn!” caused me much study and perplexity. Not until I recalled his seemingly irrational statement that his soul probably had sought to enter Wadleigh’s body, only to be repelled, did it dawn upon me that these expressions might have been provoked by just such an agonizing, harrowing, and supernatural experience.

I was dumfounded by this thought.

With all dispatch, I coded a radio to Doctor Trebaux, quoting Mr. Gray’s delirious words and my interpretation of them. I also asked Doctor Trebaux to let me know if his “dead” patient was acquainted with some girl named “Elaine.”

Back came Doctor Trebaux’s reply:

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE, New York

Your latest radio adds to the complexity of this case. Mr. Wadleigh was engaged to a Miss Elaine Brandon, of Cape Town. The engagement was broken off when he was sent to an asylum for the insane. Your theory seems not unreasonable, even though improbable. I frankly confess that I am all at sea. Mr. Wadleigh was buried this morning in an ordinary casket. Inasmuch as decomposition had not set in, even up to the moment of placing him in a vault, I took the precaution, in case he should be in a condition of suspended animation only, instead of death, to bore holes in the casket lid, and to

leave it unfastened. I also placed a week’s supply of liquid provisions in the vault, using special thermos bottles as containers warranted to withstand the effects of the warm climate here. This is all that we can do, now, except to await further developments—if there are to be more phenomena. I shall revisit Mr. Wadleigh’s vault at weekly intervals. Please keep me advised of Mr. Gray’s condition.

DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX.

When I turned toward Mr. Gray, after reading this, my patient was sitting up in bed.

“I’m hungry as a bear, doctor,” he said.

I attended to his creature wants, and then questioned him at some length. He told me that he had felt himself dying as Mr. Wadleigh, but that the sensation was merely one of deepest languor, nothing more.

“Although I did think I was going, as William Gray, too!” he exclaimed. “I began to feel so numb.”

Beyond this, however, I could glean no new information, no further enlightenment than I have set forth in this thesis.

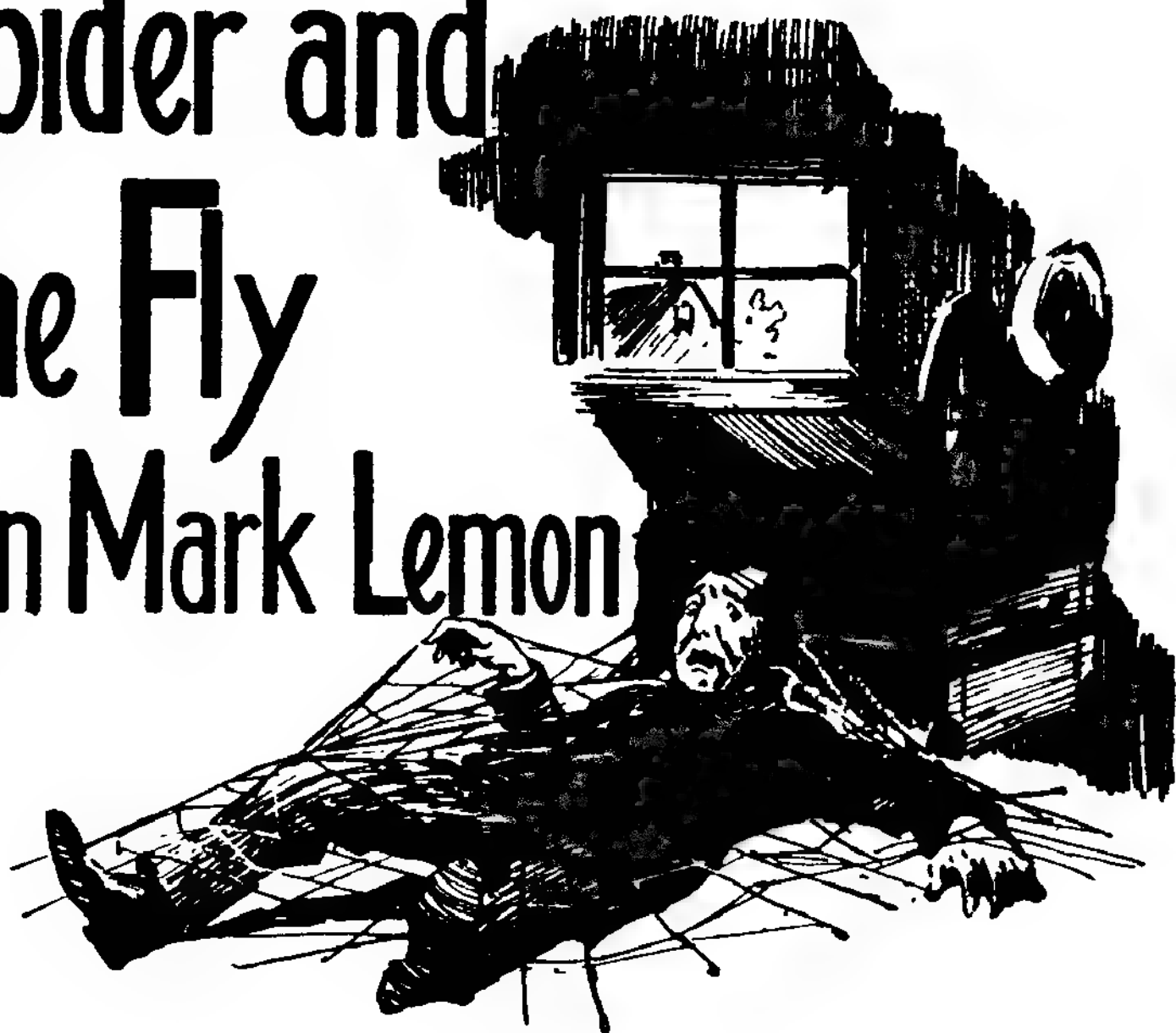
Four days later, after consultation with other specialists, I pronounced Mr. Gray sane and had him taken to his home.

Here, on the fifth day, I introduced Mr. Gray to Mr. Broadwell, who doubtless will publish more of Mr. Gray’s story from a viewpoint other than this cut-and-dried narrative of a scientist.

Should any remarkable phenomena follow the visit of Doctor Lucien Trebaux to the South African tomb of Mr. Wadleigh I shall be happy to make them public. In the meantime, as I said at the outset, I have formed no conclusions, can offer no explanations, and must, perforce, be content, as Doctor Trebaux so happily phrased it, to consider the “Double Man’s” case as being still “in status quo.”

The Spider and the Fly

By Don Mark Lemon



A SLIGHT scream came from the adjoining room, and Robert Neil dropped the book that he was reading and hurried through the doorway. He found his wife with her eyes fixed in alarm upon her left hand, which she held out at some distance from her body.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I've been bitten!"

"Bitten, Julia! By what?"

"A dreadful black spider!"

Neil took his wife's hand in his and looked at it; there was a slight, angry spot upon the palm. He kissed the hand gently, then placed his arm about his wife. "Come, let's put it in hot water to scatter the inflammation, and you will be all right in five minutes."

"But, dear, it was such a horrid big black spider!" said the wife, after her injured hand had been held a while in hot water, then wrapped with a soft strip of linen.

"Nonsense, Julia! Only a common house spider."

"Anyway, dear," maintained the wife, "it wasn't a common spider, for just before it bit me I heard it singing on the wall."

"Singing!"

"Yes, singing."

"Nonsense, sweetheart!"

"But, dearie, it was singing—or making a kind of singing noise. At first I thought that it had caught a fly in its web, and the singing was caused by the fly beating its wings, but I soon found there was no fly in the web and it was the spider that was making the strange singing noise. Then the horrid thing leaped on my hand and bit me!"

Robert Neil took the injured hand in his own and covered the bandage with kisses, and either the kisses or his laughing assurance satisfied his wife, for she returned to her household duties and soon had forgotten the incident of the spider's bite.

But Neil searched along the wall of the room until he found a large black

spider sitting in the heart of its web, singing. He dispatched the creature, making a purple spot on the wall, which he partially erased with his handkerchief. He then burned the handkerchief.

A week passed and husband and wife had forgotten about the spider bite, when the incident was suddenly recalled to Robert Neil upon hearing his wife singing. It was a foreign song, yet that was no reason why the peculiar whistling-singing note of the black spider should again and again repeat itself in the voice of the sweet singer in the adjoining room.

Neil called himself a fool for his fancies, yet a moment later he entered his wife's chamber and begged her to sing him an English song. He didn't like the air that she had been performing. It failed to do justice to her voice.

The young wife complied, and stooping to kiss her hair, Neil discovered a large black spider crouching in the brilliant jet folds. Shudderingly, but without informing his wife of the fact, he managed to knock the hairy creature to the floor and tread upon it. Then he went about the house, from room to room and press to press, hunting for spiders. Large black spiders that sat in the heart of their webs, and sang. But he found none.

At least not for a week. Then a black spider appeared suddenly on the carpet and leaped along and ran up the dress of his wife, lodging itself in her dark hair. His wife was seated at the piano, singing.

Robert Neil understood. It was the note that had come into his wife's voice—that peculiar whistling-singing note—that had attracted the spider to her person. To the black, hairy creature his wife was one of its own kind.

The next morning, coming softly into the parlor, Neil found his wife seated by the window with her ear bent over a handkerchief that lay upon a

small music rack. She was intently listening to something. What could it be? He approached unobserved and looked over her shoulder. There was a fly trapped beneath the handkerchief and his wife was listening to the buzzing of its wings.

Robert Neil was a brave man, but as he crept from the room and stole away across the fields his knees shook under him like those of a sick child.

When he returned to his home an hour later he found his wife seated on the porch with a book in her lap and her face greatly animated. He looked into the sweet eyes that greeted him and called himself a fool and a coward. Heaven had not condemned this fair young spirit to any such horrible doom as he feared!

He kissed the lifted face and without looking into the folds of the heavy jet hair for something black and hideous, sat down beside his wife. Then she began to jest at him.

"Dearie," she said, "I wish you were fat. I like fat men."

"Why, Julia, you are growing quite material!"

"No, dearie! But I do wish you were fatter. Do you remember Harry Hall?"

Neil did, and now he recalled how his wife had once compared the man to a big bottlefly. The recollection brought him to his feet. Flies and spiders!

"Why, dearie, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

The man resumed his seat and, bracing himself in his chair, attempted to smile. "'Twas nothing, Julia. I thought I heard some one at the gate."

Julia Neil looked toward the gate and wondered that her husband should have fancied that some one was coming. Then, after a moment's brooding, she arose and placed her arm about her husband.

"Dearie, I want something."

"Well, Julia, what is it?"

"You won't laugh?"

"Laugh? Nonsense!"

"Well, dearie, I want a hammock."

"A hammock?"

"Yes, a hammock."

"Very well! Anything else?"

"No, that's all."

The next morning Neil returned from the village with a large hammock, which he swung on the porch in the cool shade of the trellised morning-glories that climbed the house wall. An hour later he discovered that the hammock was gone.

He immediately questioned the two servants, but they protested that they had not taken his purchase. He then thought to question his wife, but why should she have removed the hammock? No! some tramp had stolen it.

He soon returned from the village with a second hammock, which he also swung on the porch. Then he concealed himself behind the summer-house and watched.

In a few minutes his wife came out upon the porch and, discovering the second hammock, untied the ropes and took it into the house. Neil waited a little while, then hastened indoors. Whistling boisterously, he went from room to room, searching; but he could not find the hammock. Neither could he find his wife. He stopped whistling and reflected. The attic! Ah! his wife had gone up there. He would go up and help her hang the thing. He went to the head of the stairs but found the attic door locked. He listened. Some one was moving about within the attic room, busily engaged—and singing.

His wife was hanging up the hammock! The two hammocks! Ah! she was going to have a hammock party up there in the attic, and when everything was ready, she would send out invitations——

"Oh, God!" sobbed the man, and,

turning, he went down the stairs, out of the house into the wide fields.

It was night when he returned. The servants had left a lighted lamp in the sitting room and gone off to the village. He blew out the light and sat down in the dark, waiting for his wife to come to him.

Suddenly a sound reached his ears from somewhere above—a strange half-singing, half-whistling sound that momentarily grew louder. He tried to rise from his chair, but failed. Again he tried to rise, and this time succeeded. He took a step forward in the dark and not falling, took another. Then he rushed headlong through the doorway, up the attic flight of stairs, and burst into the attic room.

It was pitch dark up there and he could see nothing, and hear nothing now, for his sudden entry had disturbed the occupant of the room.

He stood very still and listened. Suddenly the weird singing was resumed, very softly at first, but growing louder and more distinct, seemed to charm him and leave him powerless to move.

Another sound now reached his ear—the sound of something running softly about him, that wound his rigid form in a thousand strands of some material substance, which, as it bound him closer and closer, adhered to his hands and clothing as if covered with glue.

His eyes had grown more accustomed to the dark and as this last sound ceased, the white blur about him resolved itself into a network of many glue-covered cords that bound him rigid and helpless, while crouching in a hammock swung in a far corner of the attic was a thing with two luminous eyes set in a woman's face, that watched him and waited, and now drew nearer and nearer, noiseless as a spider that approaches a fly caught fast in its web.

The Lost Days

By Trainor
Lansing



CHAPTER I.

"IS IT TUESDAY OR WEDNESDAY?"

VINEGAR BILL" LOCKER glared at Division Superintendent Mallon with an expression of indifferent disgust, half-concealing the torrents of wrath which were surging unspoken to his lips.

"Am I twenty-four hours late?" he demanded. "I am not. The real question, Mr. Mallon is not that. You should, instead, ask me something sensible. Ask me if a tomcat was pulling the Chicago-New York eighteen-hour train to-day into Albany, and I'll admit it. Also, that a cockroach pulled her from Buffalo to Syracuse, and that both of these high-powered animals, under their own steam, kept six steel Pullmans on schedule on both of those divisions so exactly that the section-men along the line corrected their watches when she flew by them."

The superintendent knew "Vinegar Bill" of old. Bill would "bawl out" the road's president or his fireman, with equal promptness, if the occasion seemed to demand it. He was the

crack engineer of the road. In storm or sunshine, up hill or down, with his regular train or an extra-heavy one, he could not only "make time," but he had a genius for speeding up or slowing down, for easing the seventy-mile an hour pride of the great Central system around curves with perfect safety and without even the suggestion of an unnecessary jar. Also, he could play the three hundred and more signals with such accuracy that the mathematical theory of probabilities lent a color of reasonableness to the "long-shot" odds on horses at any track from Sheepshead Bay to Juarez.

Behind that engineer, in various attitudes of dejection, sullen defiance, or wide-mouthed bewilderment, were others of his craft. There stood Paddy Ryan, who pulled the Lake Shore Limited for a livelihood, and wrote popular songs for a diversion. Behind Paddy stood phlegmatic Peter Hopkins, who shot in a little behind them both, with a train schedule only forty minutes slower and with nine cars, instead of six. Close by were Edward O'Donnel, who ran the Empire State Express,

Fritz Baum, who sustained the prestige of the system with the "Albany and Troy" flyer, with its running time of one hundred and fifty-three miles in three hours and thirty minutes, five stops and nine slowdowns. In the group farther to the rear were Tom Davenport, whose run carried the Montreal Express north and south, Harvey Roach with the Adirondack Express, and a half-dozen other passenger engineers with local runs on the same division.

The situation was unprecedented in the memory of any of them. Never before had so many engineers been called to "dance on the carpet in the super's office" at one time.

By common consent of seniority and that iron nerve for which he was noted, "Vinegar Bill" had first faced the superintendent's astounding query of how they all came to bring in their trains on Wednesday instead of Tuesday, when the running time was from two hours and forty minutes upward between Albany and New York.

A sullen growl of admiration at the onslaught of his attack warned the superintendent that "Vinegar Bill" was not to be trifled with, nor the other members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers behind him.

Yet the situation was incomprehensible.

The superintendent turned to the trainmaster at the desk beside him, and put the question baldly, and so loud that his words rang clear to the farther end of the room.

"Jim, is this Tuesday or Wednesday?"

"Wednesday, sir, according to the same calendar we have always used since I've been in the world and old enough to tell when a day passed," answered James Barr.

"Am I crazy or am I sane?" demanded the superintendent. "Has any

one shot me full of hop when I wasn't looking, or am I dreaming this?"

"If you are dreaming, we all are," retorted the quick-witted trainmaster. "Ask the chief dispatcher, though, and make sure. He's been trying for twenty-four hours to find out what ailed the trains coming in, every one of them a day late, and he's been trying to get other trains into Albany on schedule, as he always has, only to have the men on the Albany wire cursing him for a blundering idiot who was so crazy that he'd have all the rolling stock in the Hudson or piled up along the hills, if he didn't stop trying to run two day's trains on one day's time."

"Ryan, when did you leave Albany?" demanded Superintendent Mallon.

"At the same time as always," declared the engineer. "The train may have been a couple of minutes late, and I lost another two minutes, as my detention card will show, at the block of the tunnel just this side of Poughkeepsie. But I made it all up before the train stopped at a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, sir."

"Oh damnation!" roared the superintendent. "I'm not talking about minutes or detentions, Ryan. What *day* did you leave Albany?"

"It was Tuesday when I pulled out of Albany, sir," answered the engine-driver respectfully. "But I never passed so many northbound passenger trains on that division in all me life. I had two crossovers, as you know, where there's only room for three tracks instead of four, and I want to say that this business is mighty skeery. When you meet twice as many passenger trains as you ever saw before, and when you see twice as many freight hogs gruntin' along as are printed on the time card—all headed north, you're thankful that they're on different rails from the one you're hittin' the grit on."

"I had three blocks, as my detention card will show," answered the man ad-

dressed. "And none of the extra trains northbound were mentioned in my orders when I left Albany. And it is surely Tuesday, as all the other boys will swear. How in the devil *could* we be twenty-four hours late, when we took no more coal than we ever take, and had no layouts except those I have mentioned?"

O'Donnel, Baum, Davenport, Roach and the pilots of the local trains told similar stories.

The muddle deepened into an unfathomable mix-up, the more men the superintendent interrogated.

He pulled a newspaper from his desk, and flashed it before their eyes.

"Here's the evening *Sphere*," he savagely yelled. "It is dated Wednesday—see it? If I'm bugs, so is the editor of that paper—and the three hundred thousand people who buy it. And, besides, *I read Tuesday's paper last night!*"

Dispatcher George Johnson, who usually only held the "chief's trick" for eight hours under the law, but who had been frantically working straight through the twenty-four, trying to untangle the death-freighted situation, listened attentively. Both he, and the other two men who held the same positions during the other sixteen hours, had thanked God, in fear and trembling more than fifty times during their ordeal that the automatic block signals and the matchless discipline of the road had prevented accidents from rear-end collisions. Now he raised his ghastly face.

"There is some situation here, Mr. Mallon," said he, "which no ordinary investigation will adjust. Before coming in, I had a telephone call from the chief dispatcher of the Pennsylvania system at their terminal. He, too, was fighting with all the crews on all incoming trains over whether this was Tuesday or Wednesday. I phoned to the Lehigh Valley, the Delaware and

Lackawanna, the Erie, the Reading, the Baltimore and Ohio, the Ontario and Western. All of them tell the same story of hopelessly mixed schedules, and every incoming engineer, conductor, and trainman are in the same position as our own men. But we all *know* it is Wednesday."

"That isn't all," spoke up Trainmaster Barr. "The Brooklyn *Clarion* came over on the ferry to-day, with a Tuesday date line. So did the Philadelphia papers. No out-of-town papers came at all yesterday. And the incoming people on the ocean steamers all swear that it is Tuesday, instead of Wednesday. So do the commuters from Long Island and Jersey. The Jersey City papers, those of Newark and other Jersey State points all say the same thing as these train and engine crews."

The superintendent glared again at the roomful of men.

"Do you mean to tell me?" he thundered, "that people in New York City—millions of them—have gained a day on the rest of the United States?"

"It certainly looks like it!" declared "Vinegar Bill" solemnly. "How else could we be leaving Albany on time, keeping our trains to their usual speed, and arriving here at the terminal of Manhattan, as you claim we have, twenty-four hours behind the schedules?"

As the confused throng wandered aimlessly out of the office, Jack Samuels, an assistant train dispatcher, who had been listening to the conversation, walked homeward.

He ascended the stairway to the little flat where he lived, stuck the key in the door, and kissed his youngster tenderly, albeit a little mechanically.

Pale and wan, his sick wife raised her lips for his greetings.

"How are things, to-day, Jackie dear?"

"Everybody but me's gone bugs!" he

answered bluntly. "I can't make head or tail of anything they are trying to do. When Johnson came to me in the middle of my trick yesterday, and demanded why I was trying to work overtime, and get the road in bad with the eight-hour law inspectors, I thought he had lost his mind. But when, right behind him, 'Skinny' Finnegan, Mark Barstow, and Fred Warren came on duty for their trick, which wasn't due for four hours more, I began to believe that my watch had gone wrong. But it was right with the clock.

"Usually, you know, I get sixteen hours off. Yesterday I had to take only eight—and so help me God," he concluded solemnly, "they had stuck 'Wednesday' on the top of the sheet to-day on which we keep the train schedule."

"Why did they do that?" asked the perturbed helpmate.

"Dogged if I know," wearily answered Samuels, his face breaking into a smile again. "Dear, you are always right about everything. Is to-day *Tuesday* or *Wednesday*?"

"Why, Tuesday, of course."

"That settles it!" grinned back the operator. "Now I do know that *they* are the dippy dubs and not I."

CHAPTER II.

FUDDLED FINANCIERS.

GEORGE WATSON, junior partner in the great banking firm of F. S. Davenport & Co. turned to his private secretary impatiently.

"Get me Randall & Co., on the Philadelphia long-distance wire," said he.

"Hello! Hello! Who is this? Oh, is that you Mr. Peabody? Say, what's the matter with your people over there? This morning you were to take up your option on that P. C. & I. steel stock for two millions. It's almost two o'clock and I haven't heard a word from you. Do you want me to put it

on the market? You know the agreement of the pool, don't you? 'To accept on the day named the allotment herein subscribed for and to pay for the same in cash.' What's that? Tomorrow's the day? No, no, old man! It's to-day. Yes, Wednesday the fourteenth of March. That's right. Yes. No, I say, No! *This is Wednesday.* What's that? *It's Tuesday in Philadelphia?* Quit kidding, Peabody. I'm too blooming busy for nonsense. This is Wednesday in New York, all right, all right!"

And thereafter, Mr. Watson gave a fine imitation of temper, and an example of aboriginal and contemporary vernacular which must be expurgated almost in its entirety, if it is to pass muster through the ordinary channels of the mails.

After ten minutes of angry conversation, he jammed the receiver on the telephone into place, and turned again to his secretary.

"Give me the *Courier* for to-day. I wonder if I've been making a blooming idiot of myself with Peabody—and he's old enough to be my father. No; he's the idiot. This is Wednesday the fourteenth of March, just as I supposed. How could it be anything else?"

Once more Mr. Watson tried to explain to Mr. Peabody his regrets that his Philadelphia correspondents had so suddenly taken leave of their usual good sense in matters, financial. How could an international banking house like Randall & Co., generations old, fall into such an absurd blunder? It was incomprehensible! And much more of the same sort.

On their part, Randall & Co., through Mr. Peabody, the senior partner, deplored the obdurate and plainly ridiculous stand of the magnetic young financier who had risen in a decade from the position of a life-insurance agent to a world power in finance.

"Your attitude is utterly beyond the ability of any of us to comprehend," went on the steady tones of the old banker, tinged with subtle sarcasm. "More than that, it is illegal. If you are not really joking, I should advise that you see some alienist, for your egotism is evidently developing into acute paranoia. More than that, sir, you are trying to club us, for what reason we cannot understand, into paying you two million dollars in cash before it is due, sir—twenty-four hours ahead of our agreement. And, you not only do not offer us any discount for compliance with your demands, but you evidently intend, through your iteration and reiteration of an absurd and palpably false statement as to what day of the week it is, to cause us to lose a sum of money representing the interest on that two millions of dollars. Now, we bankers, sir——"

"What in hell are you trying to drive at?" exploded the New York man.

"Just this, sir! We bankers may be inclined to accept suggestions from our New York associates, but by gad, sir, we do not permit you to bulldoze us into doing a thing which is contrary to the established and conservative usage of a house of our age, resources, prestige, and standing!"

"I don't get you at all, Peabody," wailed Watson.

"Then I will be still more explicit, sir! The interest on one million of dollars, at five and two-tenths per cent per annum, which is about the average which our allotment of the P. C. & I. stock will yield in dividends at the price we have promised to pay you for it, means, in rough figures, about one thousand dollars a week for the income on each of the two millions, or two thousand dollars a week on the allotment. Now, sir, for what purpose I am still unable to understand, you call us up on *Tuesday*, and insist that it is *Wednesday*, and we must complete the

agreement which has still one more day to run. The interest amounting to three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents, sir, which this one day of time compels us to pay to you for no reason whatever—because two millions of dollars at the rate I have mentioned brings in this amount—is not a thing to consider, ordinarily. But, although that amount is a mere bagatelle, when the question of principle is involved, as it is here, we refuse to submit, sir. Go ahead with your threats, sir, and sell us out, if you dare. To-morrow, which is *Wednesday*, and not to-day, which is *Tuesday*, I shall come to New York in person, sir, and tender you bullion certificates payable in gold on New York's sub-treasury and demand that stock."

"You will?" howled Watson.

"I will!" firmly reiterated Peabody, his voice trembling with the anger which a gentleman of the old school never voices at a distance from the man with whom he is involved in a quarrel.

"Well, you old dotard!" exclaimed the newcomer into the field of finance, "you'd better put your clothes on hind side before and walk over here backward, when you start, d'ye get me? I always knew you Quakers were a slow set of zobs! But, inasmuch as you have started these personalities, I'll finish them. Your name isn't Peabody—its Rip Van Winkle! And I'm going to throw that allotment of stock, with all the rights it carries on the market in just ten minutes, if you don't get that jinx of yours by the collar and throw him over Independence Hall before then.

"You won't dare!" gasped the Philadelphia banker.

"Won't I!" bellowed the now thoroughly angered Watson. "Well, you relic of the prehistoric period, what would you do if I did? You couldn't start a lawsuit, even. If you started

out to file it on Saturday you'd wake up when the New York preacher got to the golden text and find out it was the day after—and if you ever start to vote for president this fall, unless you mend your ways, you'll be trying to drop something with Grover Cleveland's name in the box. For heaven's sake, go back to bed and get your nap out. It only takes a few minutes. Then get me on the wire, make your apology which I'll accept now, and tell me that that coin is waiting for me when I want it, which, understand is to-day! 'Do you get me, Steve?' To-day! Wednesday, the fourteenth of March, nineteen hundred and umpety-ump! So long. I've got to call Boston!"

Once more Mr. Watson hung up the telephone, instructing his secretary to get Boston on the other wire, so that he could talk to Saunders & Co. on the same subject.

"Say, Saunders," he began, when the connection had been made, "haven't you overlooked that P. C. & I. stock matter? The pool, old man, closes to-day. And by the agreement, all stock subscribed must be paid for in cash—unless, of course, you want an extension. What? *To-day's Tuesday?* Say, has the mania reached classic Boston as well as sleepy Philadelphia? Oh, get out! You are all trying to kid me to-day. Yes, yes! I've had about three hours of that guff from old Peabody, in Philadelphia, and I'm likely to get irritated at any more of it from you. This isn't the first of April——"

Watson's face took on a blank, wondering look.

"Good God!" he cried. "Is everybody mad? Or am I just nuts for a minute or two? I'll be chattering like a squirrel if this keeps up. Oh, cut it, Saunders! I say—*cut it!* For heaven's sake don't you know that I'm having too hard a time to get away with all my work in this flotation of fifty

millions to stand for a lot of senseless kidding?"

He listened, bewildered, and then abruptly hung up and hurried into the office.

"Is this Tuesday, March thirteenth, or Wednesday, March fourteenth?" he queried of Davenport himself, uncere- moniously.

The old man peered through his double glasses astride the bridge of his enormous nose. Then he growled like a caged lion, and jerked his thumb over the top of the desk.

Watson followed the jerk, with his eyes.

There, glaring at him in letters a foot long, were the words: "Wednesday, March Fourteenth."

He gave a sigh of relief and wiped his forehead.

"Ain't you well?" roared the king of financiers, pulling an enormous black cigar from his mouth.

"I was this morning," replied the elastic junior partner, now regaining his equilibrium.

"How's that P. C. & I. allotment coming along? Are they all marching up to the crib and taking their fodder?" kept on the man to whom kings bent the knee.

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir, that's what made me ask you what day it was. I've been rowing with Peabody in Philadelphia over the wire and with Saunders in Boston, because they both refuse to kick in. All the local bankers have complied with the syndicate's terms. Only three million of it is out, two million for Randall & Co. and a million for Saunders. Both of them, however, insist that it is not Wednesday, but Tuesday. I don't understand it at all, sir. That's why I came to you!"

The lion of Wall Street emitted another low growl. Then he sounded a deep-sea siren through his nose.

"Feed it to the other fish!" he com-

manded. "You've got an hour before the market closes. The next time they want to get in on a good thing, they can set their own hen. I wonder what ails them? They never backed down before—and that excuse is the most flimsy I ever heard. *Of course, it's Wednesday!* Let's go to lunch!"

Back in one corner of the office which Watson reentered to put on his coat, sat a huddled, fuddled subordinate. William Martin, assistant secretary to the financier, and ranking next to Maury Wilson, was thumping his machine with celerity and precision. Page after page of shorthand notes was stacked up before him.

Ordinarily of the most obedient and plastic temperament, to-day he was defiant almost to sullenness.

He knew that it was Tuesday and not Wednesday.

But, with a dependent mother, and invalid father, and a brother just making the start into civil engineering, Martin knew that interference in such a queer mess would only make trouble for himself, without probably, in the slightest degree rectifying the error arising from the appalling delusion which seemed to thoroughly possess the minds of all the rest.

So, as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, he opened not his mouth.

CHAPTER III.

"PUTTING AWAY" THE CHAMPION.

LANKY BOB" SLINE fretted uneasily in the luxurious parlor car of the F. F. V. Limited, en route to Philadelphia. He heeded not the long lines of cars eastbound on the trains of the Pennsylvania, nor the anxious faces of the engine and train crews, as the westbound limited flew by them. Nor did he see the tense, drawn expression on the faces of the towermen, who control the interlocking switches on the maze of steel that bridges the ninety

miles between Gotham and the little Quaker village.

"It's the last time I'll ever try to fight as a middleweight," he announced, for the twentieth time to his chief trainer, "Chuck" Pratt, who was anxiously watching him. He rolled the chlorate of potassium tablet that was biting the mucus membrane of his mouth and throat back into the corner, to enunciate more clearly.

"Don't worry," soothed the man he had spoken to. "Think of the welcome you'll be getting to-night, when the crowd rolls like the tide in through the Golden Gate at Frisco, and lets out the yell which shows the way they feel at seeing America's champion in three classes—the only undefeated man in the world."

"An' me givin' that Grenadier Burke three pounds edge and dying for a drink," came back the champion, with a cross between a whine and a groan.

"Well," retorted Pratt, "I never did see time pass like it has these last two days. I expected to easily get off that last pound and a half long before you weighed in at three o'clock to-day. But it would never do, old man, to let go of fifteen thousand dollars forfeit—beside seeing that twenty-five thousand dollar guarantee fade away, to say nothing of the picture money and as much more, perhaps, of the gate—all for the want of a pound of flesh. The minute the beam tilts, its us for the big slosh and a fat steak. Then a little sleep, and by midnight Johnny Bull will be counting out his bets in pounds, shillings, and pence to the Yanks all the world over."

The pugilist sighed again, leaned back in the chair, and closed his eyes. He talked no more until the train pulled into the Broad Street Station.

"I wonder where O'Hara is?" he muttered as they descended to the street, and signaled a taxicab. "Funny he ain't here to meet us. Did you wire

him the train we could come over on?"

"Yes," answered Pratt, signaling to the small army of trainers, rubbers, and touts who had debouched from the smoker. He turned to them.

"We're going right down to the Golden Gate Athletic Club," he observed. "You boys better come along and meet us at the entrance behind the dressing room. Don't be hittin' up any slops, now. We need clear heads all around for to-night."

To the surprise of the fighter and his trainer manager, there was very little doing in the clubhouse. Men were working in a desultory way here and there, putting up bunting, moving chairs around, nailing railings into places along the aisles and putting up big placards showing the sections of the reserved seats. Several boxes right at the ringside were also unfinished.

Mike O'Hara, with a group which included one or two men from the camp of the Grenadier, was gazing calmly at the confusion. They greeted the American champion and his trainer with considerable surprise.

"Thought you wasn't coming over till to-morrow?" said Mike, with his welcoming smile.

"Cut out the bull," retorted Sline, nervous from his long, hard preparation for the battle. "What would I wait until to-morrow for—to let you get away with the forfeit and have the papers throwin' the word hooks into me for a yellow quitter? How long before you'll be ready to weigh in, and where's that cockney who thinks he can fight? The articles call for three o'clock, and it's only twenty minutes away."

O'Hara looked at them with incredulity written large on his face. He gazed at Pratt and then back at the hope of all America, as if unable to understand what they were saying.

"But the articles call for a fight on

the evening of Wednesday, March fourteenth," said he. "What's this you're givin' me? This is the afternoon of Tuesday the thirteenth. Besides, Grenadier Burke is down at his trainin' camp at Chester, and he can't get here in no twenty minutes."

"Back to Joe Miller's joke book with that jabber, Mike," cut in Pratt sternly. "We're here on the ground and right on time, like we always are. This isn't Tuesday, March thirteenth. It's Wednesday, March fourteenth—the day named in the articles of agreement for the boxing contest for the championship of the world between Bob Sline of America and Grenadier Burke of England. Fifteen thousand dollars forfeit has been posted by each principal that he will appear on the day named, and also that he will make the weight agreed on in the articles at three o'clock in the afternoon of the day of the contest. Both men must be in the ring, waiting for the gong, at ten o'clock the same night. We're here. If Burke doesn't show, we claim his fifteen thousand forfeit, and also the ten thousand if the management does not live up to its agreement."

By this time the occupants of the building were crowding around in interested attitudes of expectation. None of the conversation was being carried on in tones suitable for a prayer meeting.

"What's bitin' you?" demanded Mike. The bald foolishness of it cut him deep. "Of course that's the agreement. But we don't stand for no rough-riders' plays here, Bob, even if you are a champ—especially when you try to pull something so raw that it bleeds. To be sure there's going to be a fight—not to-night, but to-morrow night, which is the day set in the articles—Wednesday, March fourteenth. And that goes, see?"

For the answer the champion threw the promoter a copy of the evening

paper he had brought on from New York. It bore the headline, "Wednesday, March fourteenth."

"Get your man. Of course it goes," he said tersely. "Come over to the scales, Pratt. It's ten minutes to three and if these blobs try to pull any of this twenty-four hour bluff, we'll grab the forfeits, and I'll go out to Chester and kill that English boob for nothin'. I ain't goin' to be jobbed out of a purse and a championship by a joke!"

"Now, see here," began O'Hara in the strident tone of an angered man, "have you fellows been doin' your training in the psychopathic ward at Bellevue? I never thought you used hop, Bob."

Ignoring the insult, the champion moved steadily over to the scales, and mounted them.

"Three minutes to three o'clock, Pratt," said he. "You fellows come over here, and be witnesses." He beckoned to the followers of his own camp.

They crowded around him.

"The weight is right!" roared "Chuck," triumphantly, just as the boom of a near-by clock tolled the hour of three.

The champion leaped lightly to the side of the uncompleted ring. He grabbed O'Hara by the lapel of his coat, and the savage jerk ripped the garment from the armpit halfway down the waist.

"Look at that weight yourself!" he bellowed.

O'Hara looked. Then, with a sneer darkening his face, he called to one of the men at the door.

"Phone over to the pound for a couple of dog catchers and nets, Brady, and we'll put these canines where they belong!"

The opposing training camps, hangers-on, would-be stars of pugdom and spectators tried to separate the angered men. Then chaos bubbled

gently up through the floor and engulfed them all.

Crashing, smashing, cursing—they wrestled, fought, tore, bit, and kicked along the main aisle of the long hall and through the swing doors into Chestnut Street.

Thousands of ladies, children, youths, and men of all varieties, streamed out of the nearby department stores and office buildings. A near-championship fight had become a "battle royal." The dense crowd stopped the street cars, carriages, trucks, and automobiles. They cheered on the contestants. Even the patrol wagons which came dashing from city hall and half a dozen outlying stations to answer the "riot calls" found it necessary to send the reserves in on foot.

Yowling, howling, groaning, cursing, exclaiming, the combatants, resenting their constitutional prerogative of settling their differences in their own way, turned on their new opponents. Fists met clubs. The champion himself laid three "coppers" down for the count, grabbed a club of one and threw it across the street, through a plate glass window, and into the right eye of one of the most sanctified Quakers of the old school who still engaged "in trade."

More police arrived. These, not understanding the nature of the difficulty, started in to quell the supposed rioters on the edges of the crowd, who now numbered many more thousands. Homeward bound or incoming passengers left their stalled street cars.

As the mayor was wondering whether he had better not wire the governor to call out the National Guard, the crowd melted away. From its succulent center emerged "Fighting Bob," no longer true to his cognomen. His science had gone glimmering before the left swing of a plain policeman. Behind him came the other battlers, Mike O'Hara still breathing forth threats and slaughter. Their respective cohorts,

undaunted and yet filled with the lust of the corkscrew punch or the right jab, were each firmly gripped by three paternal patrolmen.

The fighting phalanx entered the nethermost depths of the city bastile—and every charge in the criminal code except arson and murder, with a few other exceptions, was written opposite their names. Then their captors went back, diligently searching for fragments of equipment and anatomy which belonged to "the finest."

Philadelphia had not experienced so much excitement since the Centennial. In the midst of it all appeared newsboys, crying: "Get the latest extra! All about the Lost Day! *Great confusion and turmoil in New Yawk!*"

"Hey, kid!" called "Smoke" Sayles, one of the seconds of Bob Sline.

He tossed the boy a penny and began to scan the headlines of the special dispatches from New York. The night before he had slept in Jersey City, and missed the party. Meeting a friend in the train shed on the New York side as he was coming to spar a few rounds with the principal, he had followed on the next train, puzzled, worried and amazed, just in time for the last act.

For he, too, *knew that it was not Wednesday the fourteenth of March, but Tuesday the thirteenth.*

"Somebody's done put a hoodoo or a conjure on dat New Yawk town and on ebbery one but me," he finally concluded as he thrust the paper in his pocket, and started for city hall to see how fared his friends.

CHAPTER IV.

JUSTICE IS JARRED.

YOUR honor," said Attorney Robert Hart, rising in Gotham's criminal courts building, with the usual deliberate deference and accent of a man whose fee is large, "my client will waive the reading of the indictments for the

present, plead not guilty to each of them, with the understanding which I would like to have incorporated in the record, that I will withdraw the plea later in the day, and substitute in its place a motion to quash them, on the ground of their legal insufficiency."

"Is that proceeding absolutely necessary, Mr. Hart," asked Judge Horatio Murphy with just a touch of asperity.

"I so regard it," replied the attorney, "and the code gives us that right. If your honor desires, instead, we will ask leave to delay our pleading until I can prepare the necessary affidavits in support of my motion to quash the indictments. I am not making this request as a mere matter of form or to delay the proceeding. I am making it as a matter of right and in all seriousness and candor."

"The court would be glad to be advised," came from the judge, "if the motion which you contemplate is based on simply technicalities or some vital defect upon which you rely. It may be that considerable time can be saved—a very important matter with us at this time, on account of the great number of cases which must be heard. Perhaps the defect may be corrected by amending the indictments on the court's order."

"Very well, your honor," began the lawyer. "My client, Lieutenant Daniel Delaney of the police department of the City of New York, is formally charged in six of these seven indictments with the crime of extortion. In the seventh, the charge is murder—as an accessory and conspirator in the various events preceding the death of Isidore Cohen, a gambler, who was assassinated on West Forty-second Street in this city. All of these indictments, your honor, are said to have been returned yesterday, Wednesday, March fourteenth."

He paused to pick up a number of newspapers and other documents lying on the long table before him.

"As I have before indicated, judge, my preparation for this motion is necessarily incomplete. That is why I ask for the delay. But if I may substitute the hypothesis which I shall undoubtedly establish to the satisfaction of the court by numerous affidavits and other corroborative evidence, I have no hesitancy in informing your honor, and the district attorney as well, that the indictments are fatally defective, because no witnesses were heard on the day named, nor were the indictments returned on the day named in the documents themselves."

"What's that?" interjected District Attorney Hildred.

"I say that the indictments are fatally defective, because no witnesses were heard on the day named, nor were the indictments returned on the day named in the documents themselves," blandly went on Hart.

"Your allegations seem to be frivolous, sir," replied the judge impatiently. "The indictments are dated Wednesday, March fourteenth. They were found yesterday, in an extraordinary session of the grand jury—at least I was personally and officially advised that they were returned by them before midnight of that day. They were brought in to me in open court. Let me see the indictments."

He scanned them thoroughly, and handed them back to the clerk of the court as he removed his eyeglasses.

"The indictments also bear a list of witnesses upon whose testimony they are based. I cannot, of course, refuse you time to formally file such a motion as you have indicated, but I feel that I must also point out to you in advance that a plea of this kind cannot have serious consideration at the hands of this court, in view of the known facts. Do you contend that the indictments were not returned before midnight?"

"By no means, your honor," answered Hart, while he disregarded the

sarcastic smile which flitted over the face of the district attorney and his assistants. "But, with all due respect to your honor, I must insist upon my motion, as originally made, and also say here and now that *this* is Wednesday, March fourteenth, and not *yesterday*, which was Tuesday, March thirteenth!"

He returned the joint glares of the district attorney and the judge, with equanimity. The chief law officer of the country, eager as the hound to overtake the fugitive it has been pursuing, was on his feet, but waited respectfully for the utterances which he saw were to follow from the man on the bench.

"That statement, sir," commenced Judge Murphy, "is certainly unworthy of an attorney of your standing at the bar of this court. It is entirely outside of the lines of professional ethics, sir. It savors of the shyster, and I am amazed that you should utter it—especially with the hope of its being seriously considered. This court, according to its constitutional authority, sir, must take judicial cognizance of many things, among them the political subdivisions of the country, the records of other legally organized bodies for the administration of justice, which include not only courts but grand juries. It must also be bound by the commonly accepted calendar divisions of years, months, days, and hours, in all matters before it for adjudication. How, then, can you seriously stand there and offer an affront to the intelligence of the court, by such an undignified, unworthy and impossible statement of a non-existing condition?"

The district attorney sat down, again satirically smiling.

"With all due respect to your honor," resumed Hart, "I will answer that by the statement that I not only assert it, sir, but am willing to go on my oath as a man and as an officer of this court, that this is the very crux of the whole

matter. I repeat, sir, *to-day is not Thursday, March fifteenth, but to-day is Wednesday, March fourteenth.*"

"Sir——" thundered His Honor.

"I demand the right to continue," yelled back Hart. "If, as I solemnly declare, and as I shall proceed to substantiate, to-day is *not Thursday*, but *Wednesday*, and if, as I am willing to further declare I can establish the truth to be by unimpeachable evidence that no record exists either of the examination of witnesses or the return of indictments on Tuesday, the thirteenth of March, then I contend, sir, that these indictments are wholly without the law—and have no legal existence whatever. Therefore, your honor is not only bound to consider any plea in support of the proof of the facts which I have repeatedly alleged, but your honor is also bound, both by the constitution of the United States, the constitution of the State of New York, the legislative acts which give your honor a legal existence as a judge, and the oath of office which you took when elected—I say, sir, that your honor is equally bound by all these fundamental conditions precedent to your right to judge matters brought before you—not to decide a motion before the subject matter of it is formally presented to you, nor to prejudge the facts themselves, before they are legally before you in the affidavits which I am expecting to file."

"The court does not need reminders as to duties or powers from counsel appearing before it," roared back Judge Murphy, with rage-distorted face.

"This court is organized and obtains its authority from only one primal source," quickly retorted the now angry lawyer, in tones which echoed out into the street. "That primal authority of jurisdiction over the person of my client and the right to restrain his liberty because of the accusation of his participa-

tion in an alleged crime, is expressly conferred in the same document, which, by terms also equally direct, guarantees to him the right of life and liberty, unless restrained by due process of law. The various legislative acts, based upon that same constitution of the United States and the other factors to which I have referred, define with an explicitness which even your honor cannot deny nor abridge, that he must not be held for a capital or infamous crime, unless by an indictment or presentment by a jury of his peers. I say that such an indictment or presentment has not been so found. I stand here in his place, as his legal consul, by legal authority, and I insist upon the proper legal consideration of his defense, and all matters thereto appertaining. And from that position I declare I will not recede."

"You are impertinent, sir!" thundered the bench.

"I have no desire to be nor have I any intention of so appearing. If your honor so construes my acts, otherwise innocent of any such idea, I can only say that I am prepared to defend them."

"Your language, Mr. Hart, is not only indicative of a contemptuous attitude toward this court, but it is entirely without precedent or reason. I am forced, by the circumstances themselves, to take judicial cognizance of your attempt to impugn the dignity of this proceeding, and——"

"This court was organized not only to maintain the dignity of its proceedings," burst from the lips of the fighting lawyer, "but it was first created expressly for rendering justice to all men before it——"

"Sit down, sir!"

The amazed throng in the courtroom, officials, spectators, and fellow members of the New York bar, saw the attorney reluctantly comply.

"As I said, sir, I am forced to con-

sider your contemptuous attitude toward this court," went on Judge Murphy. "And I hereby direct the official reporter to enter upon the record that on Thursday, March fifteenth, I take judicial cognizance of the same, without further proof, it having occurred when the court was in legal session and in my own presence. I will give you your choice, sir, of apologizing for this motion and all your subsequent statements, or of being committed in lieu of such an apology, to the Tombs for twenty-four hours. Do you desire counsel before I formally arraign you on this charge of contempt?"

The tension was now near the breaking point. The lawyer arose from his seat, and shook his spare head with a gesture of defiance, worthy of a cave-man facing a charging dinosaur.

"There is only one lawyer in the United States with whom I would care to advise on a situation of this kind, your honor," said he steadily. "His name is Robert Hart. Under these circumstances I deny your jurisdiction of my person, sir. I stand on the same constitution which I have vainly invoked in behalf of my client. I desire to say, sir, that when a judge disregards and tramples upon authorities by virtue only of which he possesses power to assume the functions of his office, as you have done—that in such a case I will resist an unjust mandate from his lips—even if I pour out my lifeblood upon the floor of the room which he defiles with his presence!"

Somebody dropped a pencil. It sounded like the discharge of a pistol, in the utter silence which had fallen on the room.

"I will go further," came in icy tones from the man at the bar. "If I have exhibited any attitude which you are pleased to call contemptuous, it was, as I have formerly tried to make clear to this court, unwittingly.

"I would be most unworthy, sir,

of the high calling of my profession, which I have practiced with thoroughness and rectitude for many years, if I allowed the personal consideration of my own welfare or future standing in this or any other court, to influence or deter me from what I know to be my duty."

Judge Murphy writhed, in impotent fury, restraining only by the exercise of his entire nerve force, the outward aspect of a semijudicial composure. The attorney went rapidly on.

"Since your honor's last statements, since the threats of imprisonment of my person, and the shattering thereby of my only asset of good standing in my profession by a commitment for an alleged contempt of court or the alternative of an abject and cowardly apology, I will *now* say that I feel *only* contempt for an individual like yourself, mistakenly clothed in authority, and I defy you to attempt to send me to prison. I feel and deliberately express that contempt, not only toward yourself individually, but toward your contemptible farce of administering justice. And I warn you, sir, that I will never willingly submit to such an infamous and altogether tyrannical disregard of my constitutional rights and those of my client. If I go to the Tombs, I will go, not alive, *but a corpse!*"

The entire courtroom was now on its feet.

"I commit you to the Tombs for six months, sir!" howled the bench. "Officers, take that man out of my court!"

"Stand back!" burst from the attorney.

The court officer started toward him.

Hart whirled his heavy chair, and struck him full on the head. He fell to the floor.

Another started over, with drawn revolver. The maddened man with a yell of berserk rage, lifted the chair again aloft, and hurled it directly at

the second man who was endeavoring to enforce the court's command. It struck him squarely, despite his efforts to dodge. He, too, went rambling off to slumberland.

Robert Hart, with another roar of rebellion against constituted authority, leaped on the table, and sprang like a panther over the bench itself at the throat of Judge Murphy. He seized it, raining blow after blow upon his face.

Arthur Roberts, the official stenographer, who had been recording the proceedings, ran out into the judge's chambers, and bolted the door behind him.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Hart is right. *I know to-day is Wednesday, the fourteenth of March—and not Thursday, the fifteenth!*"

CHAPTER V.

IN THE GRIP OF THE LOST DAY.

THE news story which at first showed the most appreciation of the unbelievable chaos that at once sprang up between New York City—or that part of it which has its habitat on the isle which once sold for a few oyster shells—was in the New York *Sphere* on what the editor believed to be Friday, March sixteenth, but which the rest of the United States vehemently asserted was only Thursday, March fifteenth. It began somewhat in this fashion:

LOST, STRAYED, OR STOLEN:

Wednesday,
March Fourteenth.

Finder Will Be Liberally Rewarded if He Will Return It to Anywhere in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave as Soon as Possible.

HUMOR AND TRAGEDY ADD THEIR COMPLICATIONS.

Bride's Father Tries to Whip Twenty-four-Hour-Late Groom, While Police Catch Brother with a Sure-Enough Gun Looking for Him; All Outgoing Trains Are

Hopelessly Mixed. State Nominations for Mool-Boose Party May Be Declared Invalid.

Lawyer Who Slugged Judge Demands Release, Alleging Commitment Date Is Illegal on Face.

Suits of Foreclosure, Sales of Stock, Protest of Notes, Arrests of Crooks, Transfers of Real Property, and Even Editions of Newspapers—to Say Nothing of Food Eaten and Drinks Consumed—All Took Place, if We Can Believe Their Assertions, on a Day Which Has Never Yet Been Born, Except in the Borough of Manhattan.

These headlines faintly reflect the first terrible turmoil which had tumbled upon the metropolis. Only the merest fragments of the resulting confusion can be spoken of. They were infinite in number and in results reached from pole to pole. Suits for illegal acts on the missing day—mostly brought by outsiders—blew in on the bewildered clerks of the courts like a pest of grasshoppers. Then all New York papers found themselves for twenty-four hours without news from the outside world. Their frantic telegrams to the department heads of the great news-gathering agencies in other cities, like the United Press or the Associated Press, as well as the individual telegrams to out-of-town correspondents brought such replies that it reacted in a terrible pressure to the editors in conference assembled on every daily in the borough of Manhattan.

They filled their empty columns, bare of even cables from Europe, with freak stories of the resulting confusion. Men met on the streets, gazed uncertainly into each other's eyes, and either commiserated in common with their bewilderment or engaged in heated arguments with those of the microscopic minority in Manhattan Borough who held to the same belief as people on the outside.

One old chap, well known along the "Great White Way," whose hourly

boast was that he came from the land of blue grass, fair women, fast horses, and bully whisky—confided his suspicions as to the sanity of the other men who mixed their delicately flavored whisky with various ingredients of a less potent quality of stimulation.

"I alluz takes mine straight," said he, gazing fiercely around, "and no matter how much I take, I'm never out of harmoney, suh, with the state of my birth, on a question of what day of the week it is."

By this time, the people who heard him, were so overwhelmed in the maze of the occurrences, that they had no strength to argue the question. The Kentucky colonel's hope for a discussion, which might deepen into a quarrel, and perhaps end in a fine *duello*, according to the code of the old school of chivalry, was thus sunken in the slime of his own self-sufficiency.

Nor were the idlers or the great ones of earth—clothed in silken garments and reflecting the brightness of the noonday in articles of minor adornment, yet who toiled not neither did they spin—the only ones affected.

The Association of Gas and Electric Light Users served formal notice on the public utility companies that they demanded an adjustment of their monthly bills, to harmonize with the calendar of the rest of the country. And this, too, in the face of the undeniable fact, that the purveyors of these essentials had furnished them during the mysterious lost day as usual to the vast majority of the people complaining. Suit for thousands of dollars was threatened, unless their demands were complied with.

This cue was quickly taken up by large armies of renters, particularly in the tenement districts. Money weighs much to these people. It is laden with the heat of summer and the frigidity of winter. A day's rent saved meant just so much more toward food, often in-

sufficient, and clothing, frequently inadequate.

Salaried people, on the other hand, were vigorous in their demands for the New York schedule of time. They could neither see how nor why they should be deprived of a day of toil which their employers could not truthfully deny had been rendered.

Managing heads of department stores, particularly, were caught between the devil and the deep sea. A day's delay in their orders meant short stocks in the enormous volumes of many supplies which every twenty-four hours sees turned over. The same was true of the dealers in milk, butter, eggs, meats, and other commodities, all of which must reach the hungry mouths of millions on Manhattan on time, and not a day late.

The shortage occasioned by the twenty-four hours which had so inexplicably appeared and then vanished into the abyss of the past, caused a new rise in these and other commodities, particularly bread. As the city always contains many people out of employment, the hardship thus entailed accentuated and deepened what was called "the social unrest." Mobs filled the streets, defiant of authority, and fearing the policeman's club less than the hunger of half or wholly empty stomachs.

The situation was becoming intolerable, when a public mass meeting was called in Madison Square Garden at the suggestion of men whose initiative always appears in times of public crises.

It was attended by tens of thousands. Tens of thousands more blocked the streets leading to it in wedges of human beings for hours. Other tens of thousands, drawn from the city proper and its outlying boroughs, hung on the bulletins of the newspapers, whose extras containing accounts of the proceedings were bought even faster than the roaring presses could print them.

In the Garden were men and women of all conditions of life—from the president of a great trust company down to the Jewish pushcart peddler of hokey-pokey in the Ghetto. The presiding officer, the Hon. Seton Ridgeway, who had formerly been mayor of New York, spoke briefly, and then asked for expressions of opinion from the audience. Half of them stood up without delay and demanded a place on the platform.

All were unanimous in one thing: The City of New York contained too many people of intelligence, knowledge, property, and general perspective of life, to be mistaken in the passage of a day of time. It mattered not what happened elsewhere. The business life of the metropolis was the pivot on which revolved the financial welfare of the country—it was the hub of the industrial activity, the source of supply of so much of a material character that its commercial supremacy had been demonstrated since it was first settled, and the country must readjust the calendar to the time clocks of Manhattan Borough—or face the consequences which would follow because of the day they had lost.

The motion was put. Just then a speaker leaped to the edge of the platform, and demanded recognition. The man was Mayor Bentley.

What followed can best be indicated by the statement of the *Evening Sphere*:

Mayor Bentley is "in bad" again. He had the temerity to tell thousands of New York's representative people, from the lowest to the highest, at last night's mass meeting, that he knew more than they. The crowd did not agree. They whooped it up for the mayor, who would not stop trying to tell them they were all mad on the question of the lost day, which now dominates every other subject in the lives of the people of the United States. The mayor escaped, because friendly hands on the platform covered up his hurried retreat when some one suggested that he ought to be hanged, and the mob took it seriously. He is said to have

left the city, disguised as a woman, through the subway. His whereabouts are purely a matter of conjecture, although it is said that he is hiding in Brooklyn.

The motion was carried. A provisional Committee of Safety was formed to protect New York's interests. It had a membership of twenty-five hundred, of whom two hundred and fifty were vice presidents, and twenty-five of these constituted an executive committee.

In spite of the resolutions, there soon began an exit from New York of residents of the island, comparatively few in proportion to the city's great population, but numbering at least twenty thousand.

They left by steamers, ferryboats, automobiles, railways, tubes, and trolley systems. All believed the balance of Manhattan mad. This belief was confirmed ten minutes from their home. For in Jersey City, Brooklyn, Long Island, Westchester, or any other place outside of New York, it was always Tuesday instead of Wednesday, Wednesday instead of Thursday, and so on.

In fact, every one outside of Manhattan was in the grip of the lost day.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE SAM TAKES A HAND.

THE incarnation of youth, virility, and intellect, United States Senator Joshua Alden arose in his seat in the Senate Chamber at Washington, D. C.

"Mr. President," he began, "I ask unanimous consent to be heard."

"The gentleman from Arizona, Senator Alden, requests unanimous consent to be heard," said the presiding officer. "Hearing no objection, the chair grants the request."

"Mr. President, I asked for leave to interrupt the debate on the appropriation providing a national home for decrepit pinochle players, in order to pre-

sent a resolution dealing with a grave public crisis," said the former cowboy.

With that same precision of utterance and logical arrangement of ideas which commanded respect even from men not of his political faith, Senator Alden proceeded to outline the situation which existed, and to dwell briefly on the disputes which had arisen between Arizona and all other States, and the Borough of Manhattan, as to what day of the week it really was.

"I move, Mr. President, that the rules be suspended, and that the following resolution be declared the order of business for the day:

Whereas, The difference of one day of calendar time between that part of the city of New York commonly called the Borough of Manhattan, which is a political subdivision of the State of New York, which is one of the States of this Union, has resulted in confusion without parallel, apparent violation of the statutes which deny the taking of private property without due process of law, and has brought about an intolerable and unsupportable condition in the business relations of New York City and the rest of the country. Now, therefore, *Be it resolved*: that the Senate of the United States declares the situation so existing a menace to the general welfare of the United States. And, be it further *resolved*: That the Senate, taking legal cognizance of this situation and realizing the necessity for its immediate readjustment, in order that the general welfare of the entire United States may not be further affected, hereby appropriates for the investigation of this affair, by a committee of six members from its own body, the sum of fifty thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, as an emergency appropriation, payable from the general fund, on demand and presentation of suitable vouchers to the treasurer of the United States for the expenditure of the money necessary to the prosecution of such investigation. And, be it further *resolved*: That such committee, as so appointed, shall at once proceed to New York City, take testimony of its citizens and such other people as the committee shall deem wise, in order to ascertain, if possible, from what cause such confusion has arisen;

or by any other method necessary; and that they be further instructed to report, with the least possible delay, to the Senate of the United States, both their findings and recommendations for the relief or abrogation of the condition so arising and now existing.

All records for speedy legislation in the upper house were broken by the necessary steps to pass the resolution, and to carry its provisions into effect.

The committee was at once appointed. Senator Alden of Arizona was made chairman; the others members were Marcy of New York, Elliston of California, Hollister of Rhode Island, Metcalfe of Georgia, and Satterfield of Kansas.

The committee immediately convened and agreed to proceed to the seat of trouble the following day.

As the Congressional Limited drew into the Pennsylvania Station of the metropolis, its individual members were swiftly hurried to the hotel in carriages.

They entered the lobby. Groups of men and women were gathered everywhere, discussing again the topic of the lost day.

The senatorial committee had left Washington on Tuesday, March twentieth.

They had arrived in New York on Thursday, March twenty-second—although their journey had been only five hours long.

New York, in the same mysterious way as before, was again in the throes of the second turmoil resulting from the difference in time. It was now *two* days instead of *one* ahead of the balance of the country.

Another day had been lost from the calendar of the world's time, the same as the first, or New York had, with equal unexplainableness, lived two days and nights while the rest of the United States had lived but one.

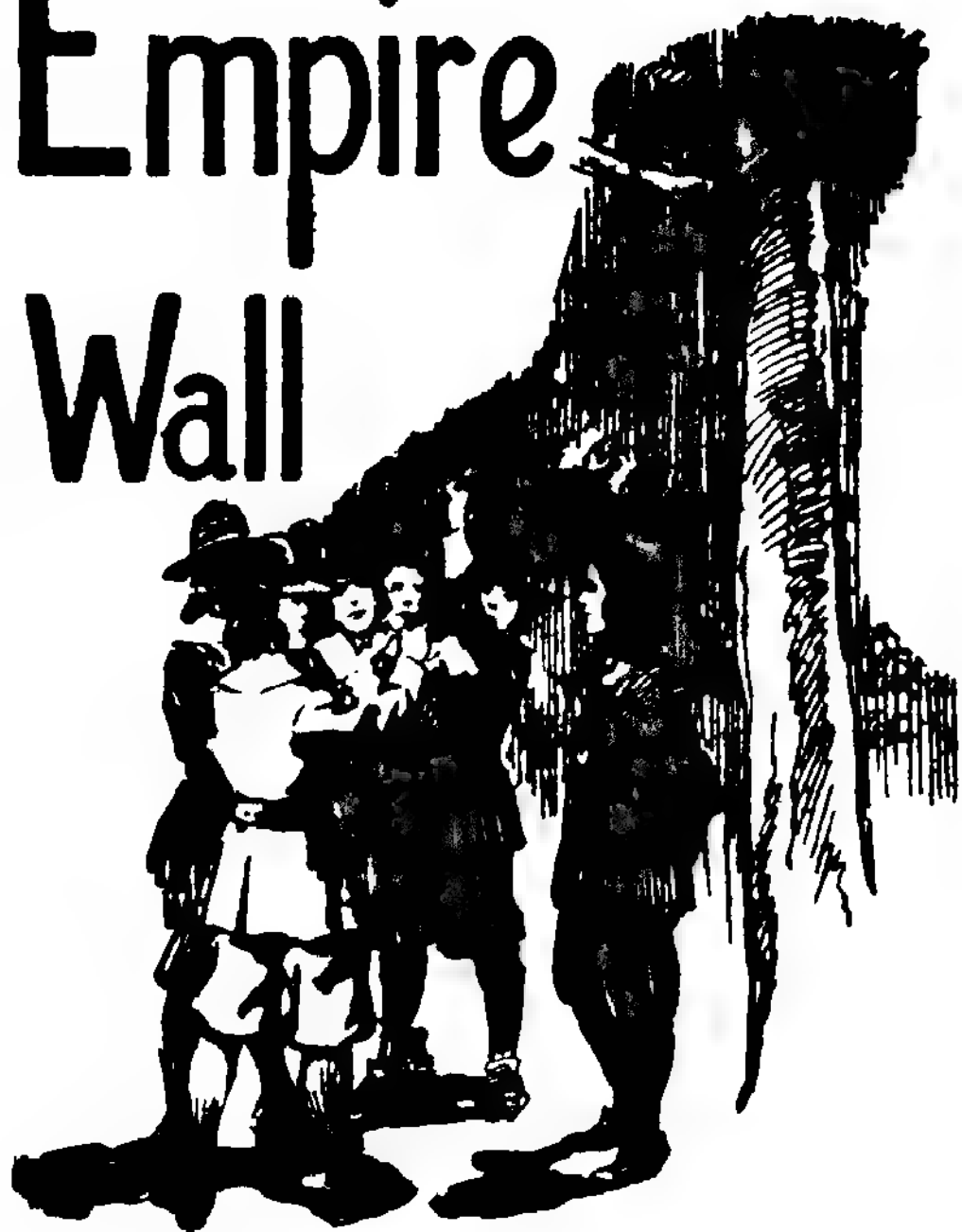
TO BE CONCLUDED.

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The Lost Empire

By
Frank Wall

CS
RA



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

John Colechurch is employed as private secretary by Godfrey Boone, a celebrated explorer, who has made a journey by *aéroplane* to the mysterious continent of the Sargassa Sea. The continent consists of floating *débris*, seaweed, wreckage, et cetera, from all the oceans of the earth. The inhabitants are the descendants of the first Pilgrim Fathers, and speak, dress, and live exactly like their ancestors. While there, Boone falls in love with Margery Powell, the daughter of Squire Powell. But before Boone is able to marry her, he is forced to return to America. Later, when Boone starts back for the Lost Continent and Margery, he loses his way, and cannot locate the Sargassa Sea, which he believes lies parallel to South America. He returns home once more, and prepares to set out again by *aéroplane*, accompanied now by Colechurch, his secretary, in order to rescue Margery and the squire from De Lorimer, an unscrupulous rascal, who is scheming to ruin the squire and make Margery his wife.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY MARGERY
POWELL IN AMERICA.

THERE are a mort of little maids that can compass their life in six words: "He loved me; he rode away:" but that, I warrant you, is not my way.

I am minded to start sooner and fetch up later than that. You shall have a goodly foundation of three centuries of Powells, with mine own pitiful story laid atop like a shrouded corpse. When

we are gotten to that stage, 'tis like you will have heard enough of my poor story to rest you quiet until the drums set abeating for Judgment Day.

So far I have traveled in a right merry gallop of romance but the tears are already finding their causeway down my cheeks. Nay, I am not of those who can jest in the face of sorrow. My heart is breaking. Do but let me tell the story in mine own poor way and it will end the sooner.

This land of America wherein we live is no mere pinprick like the Eng-

land from which my forefathers set sail three centuries ago. 'Tis a thousand miles in a straight line, and though you went so far you might still not fetch up at the coast.

I have spoken of it as America and that is how 'tis named by us but there hath always been some old wives' tale that 'tis some land of enchantment never shown on any human map. 'Tis said that when our forefathers sailed from Plymouth in the good ship *Ishmael* in the year 1609, scarce a hundred souls in all, they were beaten out of their course by contrary winds and carried far to the south of the coast whereat they had purposed to land. Where they fetched up no one knows to this day, but there was such a fury of roaring breakers as struck terror to their hearts, and they tacked about and sought anchorage still farther south. And so they sailed along for many days, keeping off the coast for fear of shoals, until at last they came to this continent which they thought must be a part of America and found none to say them nay.

They drifted to land through a mass of bright yellow seaweed that was spread upon the sea as far as the eye could reach, for all the world like a huge field of golden grain. It opened to let them pass and then clung so straightly about the keel of the *Ishmael* that they could make no headway and presently came to.

Since then 'tis said that scarce a day passes but some fair ship is caught in that treacherous seaweed, but never a one save only the *Ishmael* hath come safely to land within the dreadful circle of the Swamp Lands.

We are like in the fullness of time to breed two races here, one, on the main continent, a law-abiding people, and the other, living on the edge of the Swamp Lands, prospering by wreckage and plunder. 'Tis said these wreckers hang out lamps on high poles to

lure ships to their doom and then board them in flat-bottomed craft, slaying all on board.

'Tis like that some of these great ships would have matters of interest concerning the outer world if we could but reach them, but some are too far out at sea, and those the wreckers have plundered they destroy that they may leave no trace of their wicked work.

I sometimes think the mainland itself is naught but a vast swamp that hath gotten some measure of solidity. How far down it reaches I know not, but of a surety the water lies far beneath for many good fathoms between us and Mother Earth. We rock with every restless fit the seas have, and when we have a storm 'tis under our very feet instead of in the air, for there is never a breath of wind to stir us.

During the three centuries since our people first came here we have grown from a hundred souls to nigh upon half a million, or so they say, which is a terrifying thing to ponder. Fifty thousand live by plunder on the Swamp Lands and their crimes call to Heaven for vengeance. Some day the old prophecy will be fulfilled and the continent will be swallowed by the sea that hath builded it.

But I weary you with all these matters that have naught to do with mine own story which I set out to tell. I want to pass quickly to the day when happiness and sorrow came to me in the same turn. That was when I stared through the gates of my father's park and saw my lover coming slowly along the little lane that leads from the village.

There are laws and usages aplenty to keep a man and a maid apart, but what avail are they when the little god sets apulling them together? Indeed, they are not worth a pinch of snuff. That meeting was but the first of many. I think we should have gotten to ring and bells long ere this if it had de-

pended on Godfrey, and I could not have served him with as many nays as are spelled with three letters. But the same fate that fetched him to me drove my poor father into the power of Giles de Lorimer, and from that conjunction all our affairs went astray.

Of a sooth the trouble was of our own making. My father had always been weak when in the grip of a stronger will than his own. While I was trysting with my lover, my father must needs bring to the Manor House a boon companion he had picked up at the village inn. After that I scarce ever came back home but I found them throwing the dice or thumbing a greasy pack of cards over a game of ruffe.

I had not minded so much but that I knew my father would never dice or play with the cards unless he had a venture on the game, and I feared that in this De Lorimer would meet him unfairly. Indeed, there were black rumors afloat about our visitor. Some said he was but a wrecker from the Swamp Lands. Others whispered that he played with cogged dice and marked cards wherewith he was doing so well that he would presently be master of the Manor House.

To all these rumors my father would give but a scornful reply, saying De Lorimer was a gentleman and was not like to chouse his host. But indeed 'twas not the winning of the rogue that affrighted me but the cruel staring of his eyes when he looked at me. I read in them the purpose that lay behind his roguery, but when that time came 'twas too late to stay it. If I had said but a word to Godfrey it would have been out sword first and haply more trouble to come, for the villain had ever a band of his own cutthroats within call. And all the time my father would have it I was maligning an honest fellow who meant no harm to any one.

I had to wait until he had gotten my father so deeply in his power that the

poor gentleman dared refuse him nothing. To have won the Manor House alone might have stirred the good folks of the village against him, for the Powells had held the old place since 'twas builded three centuries ago. But if the cunning rogue could win me as well as the house, why, he might live to enjoy his ill-gotten plunder.

And meantime all went so well for him that he began to cast sour glances at Godfrey and would have had him forbidden the house. When I heard that—and heard it from my father that was become but the mouthpiece of the other—I warrant you I walked out of the house. De Lorimer was in the flower garden and I told him to his face that if Godfrey went, I went, too, and he could make up his account with that. Which he scarce found to his liking.

“You are rarely fond of the lad, mistress,” he said.

“And if I be?” I cried, “What of it?”

He dropped his pipe of clay and ground it 'neath his heel. “That much,” he said sourly. “Your lover had best have a care.”

I think my scornful look angered him. “Harkee!” he growled, “this very day I have won the last meadow from thy father. Now I have but to win his wench, and my title deeds are as safe as though I came from ten generations of Powells.”

“Say so to my father and he will bid the servingmen dust thy back with their cudgels.”

“I will say so when we have eaten our supper this day,” he said furiously.

And at that my father came from the house and I must needs run to meet him. “Hast thou angered him?” he whispered swiftly. “Now harkee, lass, this letter I would have you give to Godfrey. 'Tis something I could not say to his face. Let him have it hot-foot, and if he asks thee the kind of question little maids are all agog to

hear, see you give him naught but Yeas."

And at that he hastened away as we were come to that sorry pass he dared not be seen speaking to his own lass, and I went along the path to search for Godfrey. So my father had bidden me. I met my lover near to the Seaweed Forest that is said to be haunted ever since Master Hilles Pickens, the preacher, swore he saw a great bird fly into it, with wings that were like unto boxes and a whir that struck terror to his heart.

'Twas there I met my lover, and I have looked kindly ever since on the huge seaweed-covered trees with their little scarlet berries. Sometimes I think he must have come from the Enchanted Forest himself. Surely he was no simple gentleman like to my father, for his manner was above all of us, and he bore himself like a prince of his people.

He said he had no need to read my father's letter and thrust it into his doublet, and then he asked me if I would wed him when he came back from a journey he needs must make to see his father. I had meant to plague him, but when he had fetched his speaking to an end he looked at me in such a way as set my heart afire and drew the Yea from my quick lips ere I knew 'twas coming.

We made our parting there and then, and the tears gushed from my eyes so that I was blinded. And when I was able to look about, hoping to catch a sight of my lover ere he was gotten too far, I could scarce refrain from shouting aloud in my terror. Away in the distance I could see him, but instead of going toward the village and the high road he was running furiously into the gloomy aisles of the Forest.

I thought he was distraught with our parting, and I ran after him, calling piteously, until at last my limbs failed and I sank to the ground. No one had

ever plumbed the depths of that enchanted ground wherein he had run so lightly, but 'twas said to stretch for hundreds of miles until it merged into the Swamp Lands, where the seaweed trees had their roots in the water. That could not be my lover's home unless he was some enchanted prince that had been called back from his little spell of freedom and happiness.

I rose slowly and stared about me. Indeed I had never seen so wondrously beautiful a place. The trees towered so loftily they almost hid the sky and blotted out the sunlight. There were places where the sunshine beat down until the path looked to be afire, and there were other places where there was naught but gloom and shadow. And at that the thought came to me that the powers of darkness had swallowed up my lover and I should see him never more. I felt as though the forest had a thousand eyes to watch my misery. My limbs dragged. It was as though age had stricken me in a moment.

How I got back to the house I know not. My father was sitting alone in the great hall, staring at the leaping blaze with his head sunk deeply on his chest. I remembered how he had shivered and said that he was gotten to that age when sunshine could no more warm him and how I had bidden Marget, the serving maid, to light a fire for him. He turned as I came in, and I went and sat on the rug with my head against his knee, as I had been wont to do when my mother had first died.

"What of the lad?" he whispered.

"He went away," I said dully.

"What!" he screamed, and at that there came a stealthy creeping of footsteps behind us.

"He went away to see his father that is sick. He saith he will come back ere the new moon and then we will be wedded."

"Did he read my letter?"

"I know not. Nay, he said he knew what was in it and he thrust it away. And then he asked me."

"It is too late," he groaned.

"He was distraught at our parting and ran into the Seaweed Forest. He will never come back."

De Lorimer broke into a cry of exultation behind us. "Said I not so?" he snarled: "The lad is naught but a wrecker and a thief. He goeth back to the Swamp Lands to escape the rope that was already knotted for his neck. 'Tis a good riddance, friend Powell."

My father looked at him helplessly. "What hast thou to do with him?" I said.

"More than you have, mistress. He drew on me but an hour ago and I beat him with his own sword."

I went across to the wall where my father's sword hung upon a nail and I took the sheath and beat him so lustily over the head that he roared for mercy. And when I was tired I threw the sheath in his face.

My father ran from one to the other of us, praying that we would make our peace together, whispering to De Lorimer that he must keep Godfrey's name out of his speaking, whispering to me that this false rogue had robbed him out of hearth and home and could turn us out when he pleased, calling a plague on the pair of us for that we made his life a burden.

De Lorimer took no heed of his wild sayings but stood staring out of the window, while I watched him curiously. And suddenly he came to us and fetched a greasy pack of cards out and flung them to the table. "We play now," he said.

"Now?" echoed my father and he looked at me. But I shrugged my shoulders scornfully and walked away.

De Lorimer cast no glance at me. "We will dice to see who will first throw a trey," he said, "or we will play

at ruffe or trumpe or new cut or what you will with the cards. If I win I take the wench to wife and you give us houseroom. If I lose——" and at that he smiled cunningly, leaving a loophole for himself.

But my father was already reaching out a trembling hand for the cards. He drew back suddenly. "The maid is no wife for you," he said. "She will beat you whene'er she is angered."

"She will not beat me after we are wed," quoth De Lorimer harshly. "Will you play at ruffe or noddie or what do you choose?"

"Nay," said my father, "there is no game like unto ruffe. The coats and suits are sorted in trumpe, but in ruffe the greatest sort of the suit taketh the prize, and that is what I like."

"Then get to it," quoth De Lorimer sourly, and at that there was silence save only for the hard breathing of the two men and the shuffling of the cards.

And all this time I sat on the window ledge and stared across the flower garden to where I could see the yellow and red of the seaweed trees like a painted forest. Sometimes I turned and looked at the players, who were crouching over the table and thrusting the cards at each other as though they were swords.

I think my father had meant to take the desperate chance that he might win this game and free us from the rogue that had gotten us both tied up so scurvily, but of that I know naught. I only know that he stepped back suddenly, so that his chair fell with a clatter. I came slowly across the polished floor, and De Lorimer sprang forward and clutched my wrist, snarling in my face until his yellow teeth glistened horribly.

"You are gotten to the end of your beatings, mistress," he said. "Ere long it will be my turn to give and yours to take. I will have you so tamed you will creep to my chair and eat from my hand."

"He went to see his father that is sick," quoth I, and I laughed in his face.

"Ods my life!" quoth my father. "The lass hath lost her reason. She is more like to go to the bowsening pit than the altar."

"I will wed her first," said De Lorimer hoarsely. "I will have her mine ere that cursed puppet can come back. She shall cry mercy for every blow she gave me, and when I am done she can go to the bowsening pit where the mad folk are taken and wait for Godfrey Boone."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY JOHN COLE-
CHURCH IN ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUND-
LAND.

I HAD a confused impression that some one had entered the room, but my mind was concentrated on a tremendous idea that had suddenly gripped me. It was not until he spoke that I realized Mr. Boone was standing by my side.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said.

I came from my reverie slowly, staring at him in a half-confused manner.

"Has it any thing to do with the Lost Continent?" he said wistfully.

"Yes," I answered, and he turned away and walked to the window.

"Well?" he said, with his face averted.

"Will you give a fancy-dress ball, limited to early seventeenth century costumes, a week from to-day?"

"A week from to-day? That is just three months since I returned!"

"That is why I want it to be held on that day."

"I'd like to do anything you ask, John. Ever since you came I've had an idea that through you I would get back to that Lost Continent, but how can I? My friends are all scattered at this time of the year. Some are in

Montreal, others in California, others have gone over to Europe."

"It is precisely your friends I don't wish to invite," I said hurriedly. "I don't make this request lightly, Mr. Boone. You will believe that. I want to make up the invitation list myself. You will not know any of the guests—except Gervase."

He nodded wearily. "Of course, I agree." And then he gripped my arm with tremendous energy. "Everything I have or hold is subordinated to this search."

That brought me to the second part of my request, which was to inspire him with the most absolute confidence. I rose from my chair and spoke as slowly and deliberately as I could. "I want you to believe, Mr. Boone, that at midnight on the night of this ball you will be on your way to Margery Powell!"

"I do believe it," he said quietly, and then his voice thrilled with a sudden exultation. "I have felt this day was coming. I have dreamed that you and I stood in the great hall of Powell Manor with Margery behind us and that rabble at our swords' point."

Just for a moment a sudden terror smote me at the sight of such absolute trust. I wondered what would happen if I failed him. I wondered whether I would be able to justify my tremendous promise. What happened I don't know to this day. I only know that confidence poured in upon me like the coming of a mighty wave and he saw it and leaped forward and clasped my hand.

From that moment until the night of the ball we sustained each other in a trust that was superhuman. It transcended all human limits. It had no limits. It was blind, heroic faith that could rise or stoop to anything.

The arrangements I had to make kept me busy all that week. I paid a flying visit to Gervase in Montreal and se-

cured his eager coöperation, and through the good offices of some of my theatrical friends there and in New York I made up my list of guests.

Then I hurried back to Newfoundland. Under ordinary circumstances, the pastoral beauty of Nova Scotia and the swift alternations of light and shadow that give the scenery of Newfoundland such a distinction would have enthralled me. I saw none of it. The train drove swiftly past great, granite-bedded hills rising sheer to the skyline, through forests of spruce and fir, and in and out of valleys where the sunshine drowsed warmly; but I stared out of the carriage window unseeing. I had organized one part of my plan, and my mind was busy with the other part, infinitely more difficult.

When I got back to Boone Park I had every piece of modern furniture in the house removed and hidden away. I even had the chandeliers covered with evergreens and placed huge torches in the carved wooden hands that jutted from the walls in seventeenth-century fashion to receive them. In every way I made the place absolutely Jacobean, even to the dresses of the servants and the wines and refreshments.

From all knowledge of these arrangements I purposely kept Mr. Boone excluded. He remained as much as possible in one room, and when he had occasion to go elsewhere I hurried him through with his eyes downcast. When the great night at last arrived, he had not the slightest idea of the changes I had made.

And all the time I preached confidence to him at every opportunity. It was easy to do this, for I had come to believe wholly in my plan, and my enthusiasm became contagious. On the evening of the sixth day I had him in exactly the state of mind I wished him to be, quietly confident and with his nerves thrilling responsive to every stimulus.

Gervase arrived that evening from Montreal and took Mr. Boone out immediately after dinner, which we had in the library, the one room I had not changed. They went out in the car and Gervase kept him going until daylight broke, so that Mr. Boone would have only a couple of hours' sleep on the night preceding the ball.

As for me, I took a sleeping draft that rested every faculty of mind and body for four and twenty hours. They woke me in time to dress for the great event. It was just as important that I should be tingling with vitality to my finger tips when midnight came as that Mr. Boone should be drowsy and amenable to the influence of a stronger will.

He and Gervase and I, dressed in early seventeenth-century costumes, were standing in the great hall when the guests began to arrive. They had come in via Port au Basques and St. John's earlier in the evening, but we had kept them carefully out of sight. When they were announced, Mr. Boone was taking his first view of the changes I had made and his eyes were bright with the keenest appreciation. The blazing torches clenched in the carved hands that jutted from the walls pleased him particularly. And then we heard the bell ring and I leaned forward to whisper to him.

"Don't be surprised at the visitors. This is a real seventeenth-century ball and I have brought some real seventeenth-century guests. Speak to them as they speak to you."

"Mr. Ben Jonson and Mr. William Shakespeare!" cried the butler sonorously, announcing the first two of our visitors.

"Ods my life!" quoth the smaller of the two men merrily. "He hath put the cart afore the horse. I will not suffer this clumsy galleon to come atween the wind and my nobility."

"Nobility your grandam," said the other. "Pray you take no heed of this

pestilent fellow, friends. He is distraught with the vapors of his own wild imagination."

Mr. Boone stepped forward with a cry of sheer delight. "I would not have foregone this meeting for a hundred pounds," he cried. "Had I guessed your coming I had made this house like the Field of the Cloth of Gold."

"Mr. Francis Bacon! Sir Walter Raleigh!" called the butler.

And so it went on until all the guests were assembled: Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, Bacon and Raleigh, Tom Lodge and Marston and Drayton and rare Dick Hakluyt and even old Stowe, all ruffling it bravely with their slashed doublets and hosen. Truly the manor house had never seen such a gathering of the immortals.

The fact was, of course, that I had enlisted the services of some theatrical friends, Gervase advancing the necessary expenses, and they had come all this way to help me in my big plan. Rarely well they did their work, and the hall was bright with their finery and rang with their merry quips and laughter.

I never saw a man so much in love with make believe as Mr. Boone was that night. He laughed and jested as though he had not a care in the world. He talked with Shakespeare and Jonson of the theaters and the Olde Mermaid Tavern and with old John Stowe about the history of the city; he pledged Dick Hakluyt the parson in a right bumper of Sherris Sack, with a murrain on who treated Jack Sailor scurvily; and then he must get Raleigh and King James I together and ask the latter why he had the head lopped off the former in the Tower of London.

And so he went from one group to another, breathing the very spirit of the seventeenth century, until at last the evening waned and I saw that the fingers of the great clock were close upon midnight.

I made a sudden sign to Gervase, and we went swiftly across the polished floor, coming up behind Mr. Boone, who, at that moment, was standing alone. I remember noticing the tired look in his fine eyes as he turned to meet us, and then I thrust him suddenly under the hypnotic influence and he staggered and fell into our outstretched arms.

We took no notice of the people who stood about us, but lifted him swiftly and carried him into an inner room and thence to his own apartment. There I placed him deeper under the influence, and when that was done we carried him down to the secret hangar.

It did not take us long to complete our arrangements. Mr. Boone was strapped firmly into his seat and we placed his hands on the starting levers. I sprang into the passenger's seat and leaned out and gripped Gervase's hand for a moment. We knew each other, he and I. "Good-by and good luck," was all we said.

Then I turned to Mr. Boone, who was sitting as motionless as a statue, with his seventeenth-century suit hidden beneath a heavy aviation rug. I called his name and he turned slowly and stared at me.

"You know where you are?" I asked him.

"In my biplane."

"What is the name of the country where you left Margery Powell?"

"America."

Gervase and I uttered a cry of amazement. "What part of America?"

"I do not know. I have flown all over America from the Franklin Islands to Cape Horn. I can't find it. That is what they called it."

"You did not call it America in the account of your visit."

"I did not wish to mislead you. It must be a mistake. Columbus landed in Cuba and thought he was in India."

I concentrated all my energies in one

tremendous effort of will power. "Take me to the Lost Continent now," I said slowly.

He lifted his hands helplessly.

"Place your hands back on the levers. Take me to the Lost Continent."

"I can't. I have tried again and again."

"Try again. Start your engine."

The air was immediately filled with the whirring of the propeller. The great biplane began to move steadily across the clearing. It broke into a kind of clumsy gallop on wheels and then it swept up into the air at a frightful speed.

I dared not speak. One false move now and we should both be flung down to our death. My sensations were extraordinary: exultation and terror, confidence and dismay, all took possession of me in turn. But the dominating feeling all through was one of determination. No matter how frightened I felt I would not go back now, even if it had been possible.

It was a very bright night, and I could trace the broken coast line of Newfoundland with the great Bay of Placentia right below me. I could see the steel lines of the railway stretching to the northeast until they seemed to run right into the little oblong of water which I knew to be the harbor of St. John's. And then the machine swooped round to the west, bearing slightly in a southerly direction, but always keeping within sight of the coast.

We crossed to Nova Scotia almost over the route of the Reid steamships, going so swiftly that we made the passage between Port au Basques and Sydney in less than an hour, and then we swept over the Bras d'Or and traversed the gardenlike beauty of Nova Scotia. Hour after hour passed, and still we went on. We missed Montreal altogether because we cut across from the western end of Nova Scotia to Massa-

chusetts, and from there we flew over the Atlantic States right down to Florida.

Mr. Boone's eyes were fixed on his controls, and he seemed quite unconscious of my presence. I dared not disturb him because the conviction grew upon me that he was going straight to the Lost Continent. I was neither confident nor nervous now, but merely fatalistic. I had done my best. The rest was on the lap of the gods.

I don't want to weary the reader with a mass of geographical detail. We flew from the moonlight into the sunshine and all through the long hours of an intolerably long day. Mr. Boone was entirely under my influence, except in so far as driving the machine was concerned. He ate and drank when I bade him, but even during that time his eyes were fixed rigidly upon the levers of his biplane.

There came a certain hesitation in his action when we were past the peninsula of Florida and heading straight for the Gulf of Mexico. But he drove steadily forward, and soon we lost all sight of land again. On his present course, the nearest land was at least a thousand miles away—so, at least, I thought.

I had, in fact, lost all trace of our whereabouts, and my only conviction was that the Lost Continent must be somewhere in South America. There was certainly no place in Central America that could contain a continent two million square miles in area. And yet——

"What is this land we are approaching?" I said hoarsely.

He did not even turn his head. "It isn't land," he said dully. "It's the Sargasso Sea, the great rubbish heap of the Atlantic. It's a floating mass of seaweed and flotsam and jetsam from all the world. I always avoid it."

He pulled the biplane round in a more westerly course as he spoke, so

that we should not fly over this uncharted area where there was certainly little chance of a rescue if we fell. And yet, even as I thought no ship would find us in that Dead Man's Land, I saw far below us the hulls of countless ships.

"They're not moving," I said, with no understanding of the tremendous import of my remark.

"They're all caught in the seaweed," he answered gravely. "The wreckers go out on rafts and murder all on board. That's what De Lorimer wanted me to do," he added.

"Turn the machine!" I screamed. "Turn it! Drive right over the seaweed! Quickly! Quickly!"

He pulled us back into our former course without a word, and we headed straight for what seemed to be a continent of seaweed, sweeping furiously over mile after mile of the swirling masses. I recognized the Swamp Lands and then the Seaweed Forest, where the upper branches of the trees were so shrouded in the yellow weed that one could scarcely tell sea from land.

And so at last we came to the clearing where Mr. Boone had made his first landing. He drove straight toward it without any comment and glided down on to the smooth turf as though it were quite a regular proceeding. I saw the yellow seaweed climbing about the gnarled trunks and losing itself in the gloom overhead. I felt the stealthy quivering of the earth beneath my feet. Everything was just as he had described it.

Mr. Boone sat with his hands resting on the controls and his eyes brooding thoughtfully. I thought he was coming to himself, but I dared not risk too sudden an awakening. I sent him off into a long sleep, telling him to return to his normal self.

That was about six o'clock in the evening. I seated myself with my back to a huge tree, intending to watch while

Mr. Boone slept, but an overpowering drowsiness crept upon me, and I, too, fell into a heavy sleep.

It was broad daylight when I awakened, in a sort of daylight I had never seen before, with great shafts of sunlight thrusting through the trees that stood around us and beating down flatly from above. Away in front of me the light streamed down a great aisle of the forest, turning the dull yellow of the seaweed-shrouded trees to the color of beaten gold.

"The village is down that path," said a voice at my side, so thin and weak that I failed to recognize it and sprang hastily to my feet.

"The village is down that path," repeated Mr. Boone, and this time my alarm had a genuine basis. His face was flushed and his eyes were unnaturally bright. And his hands were trembling.

"I'll be all right soon," he said. "I've been walking about. I'm worn out. I feel queer."

"But what does that matter?" he cried, with a sudden wildness in his voice. "We've found the Lost Continent as you promised. And Margery — let us go."

But within an hour he lay in a raging fever, calling passionately upon the little maid, pleading with Roger Powell, heaping imprecations upon De Lorimer. I dared not leave him, even for a moment. We had a little medicine chest, and I did what I could with that.

It was not until the morning of the third day that he came to himself. I heard him calling feebly as I lay on the borderland between sleeping and waking and I hurried to his side.

"I'm better," he whispered. "I was taken bad when we landed, wasn't I? Look here, I've been dreaming of Margery again and again. I heard her calling for help. We must go to her."

"It's several miles away," I said

miserably. "You couldn't walk as many yards."

"But you can. Leave me here. You can put some food by my side. One of us must go."

He was working himself back into his fever. I thought over the position from every angle, but each of them led to the same conclusion. "I'll go, Mr. Boone," I said.

"You and I have got a stage beyond calling each other 'mister,'" he said quickly. And then he began to give me my instructions as to the best way to approach the Manor House and the stand to take toward the captain.

Within half an hour I was striding through the broad aisle that formed a kind of natural highway from the clearing to the village. The place had such a terrible reputation that I did not meet any one until I came at last to the edge of the forest and saw the cottages and the turreted towers of the old manor house.

I had left my aviation suit behind and my suit of black velvet with Mechlin ruffles at the wrist had only one fault, that its very richness fetched all the villagers about me in an instant.

When I came from the forest they were all gathered round an old woman, bating her in some uncouth way and goading her to fury. They broke away from her to come to me, and she stumbled after them, cursing furiously, but no less eager than they were.

They made a circle about me as though I were something escaped from a show. "'Tis a guest for his honor at the big house," quoth one huge fellow, whose gray doublet and loose breeches, made somewhat in the fashion of a boy's bloomer suit, gave him an extraordinarily comical appearance.

"They have one guest too many a'ready," muttered another angrily, and at that the old woman thrust her way into the circle and stared up into my face.

A great laugh went up. "Here be Janet the witch," roared one. "She will read un like a printed book."

The old woman said nothing. She had turned away from me and was drawing great circles with her staff in the unpaved causeway.

"She be muttering the prophecy again," screamed a lass in a green frock, and the crowd was in an uproar at once.

"Stand back!" I cried roughly. "Ods my life! What is the harm in her foolish whimsies? Let her draw circles till the Day of Doom and it pleases her."

"You know it?" said the hag eagerly.

But she only peered into my face, her rheumy old eyes glittering. "You know it!" she shrieked wildly. "You be one of the strangers that come from the Seaweed Forest. You will tell these greasy trollops that the Day of Doom be on us."

"'Tis a poor lost soul," quoth one of the men. "She has gotten some foolish rhyme in her head. It may amuse your honor:

*"When strangers conquer air and see,
When water laps the seaweed tree,
When sea is land and land is sea;
Then the Day of Doom shall be."*

"It jingles rarely," I laughed, "but I did not come here for that. Pray you tell me if I shall find Mistress Margery at the old house there."

"Why, now, your honor hath thrown the handle after the ax," quoth the fellow sheepishly, and the next moment he was thrust aside and the old woman was by my side again.

"I was her nurse," she whimpered. "'Twas the stranger drove me out. He would have married her, but she talked like the mad people, and her father stood him off. But to-day they are taking her to the bowsening pit where the mad people are kept."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY JOHN COLE-
CHURCH.

THERE flashed across my mind such a terrible picture of the manner in which the earlier centuries dealt with mad folk that I think I groaned aloud.

"They are taking her to the bowsening pit," screamed the hag. "If your sword be aught better than a bodkin you will use it now."

"Have done!" snarled one of the men. "Would you bring the wreckers down on us? This De Lorimer hath a score of cutthroats at his back."

"What of that? You be men, too. Thrust your great swords at her heart rather than leave her in their hands. 'Come!' she screamed. 'Is there one of you that hath not had a kindness from the lass?'"

"That have I," quoth one fellow suddenly. "I'll strike a blow for the little mistress!"

"And I!" roared another.

"And I!"

The crowd split asunder in an instant. They dashed into the cottages around the green and leaped out again with swords and axes and great oaken cudgels. I lugged out my rapier and off we went, with the old nurse shuffling at our heels and stirring us to greater fury.

The great hall of Powell Manor hath a length of nigh upon a hundred feet, and in all this space there was but one man to meet us. He sat in a drunken sleep, with his tankard spilled across the table and his white hair lying amid the ale. The noise of our tramping and shouting roused him and he lifted his head, staring stupidly across the smooth polished floor. "I think ye are all mad to-day," quoth he.

"Where is the little mistress?" screamed the old woman.

"De Lorimer and his men have taken her. They are gone to the bowsening

pit. They were like to kill me," he whimpered: "They swore she was like the abram men that seek pity by shamming to be mad. They took her away, a score of them to one poor lass."

He was stammering out his sorry tale when the big fellow that stood by me suddenly swung his cudgel and rushed across the room. "Let me to him!" he roared. "Hands off! Nay, I shall be ready for the pit myself if I listen to him. Stand back!"

I held his arm and the others helped me. "There is better work to do," I urged. "The maid is in their clutches. Where is this place they are taking her?"

The question spurred the nurse like the clashing of a fire bell. She ran toward the door of the great hall at an extraordinary speed, her gray hair streaming, her years cast aside. Her fury possessed the villagers. They streamed after her until she turned suddenly at the door and so cursed the old man that they shrank back in horror.

"In waking, in sleeping, in sitting, in standing, in eating, in drinking, may the curse be upon you!" she screamed. "May you pine to death and be held to life! May your flesh rot, and your eyes drop from their sockets! May you feel the thrust of a hundred swords every time you see a child! Without peace, without rest, without happiness, may you suffer unceasingly until you have paid a thousand times for all the little mistress shall suffer this day!"

She was out of the great iron-studded door like a flash, but now there was not one who would follow her. They were huddled against the wall; their faces white, their hands trembling. The old man had staggered to his feet, reeling and swaying, and then he crashed to the floor and was dead ere they reached him.

I cared naught for him. I begged and prayed the villagers to go with me. I cursed and threatened them. I urged

them in every way I could call to mind, but 'twas all in vain.

I could hear the nurse shouting wildly, but her voice grew ever fainter and fainter. And at last I went berserk, as the old Norsemen were wont to do in the fury of the battle, and ran forth alone to rescue the little maid or die in the trying of it.

The sunlight beat warmly on my face as I burst out of the hall and ran down the path. All about me were growing the most beautiful beds of flowers and the grass was like a soft carpet to my feet, but I heeded it not.

Away down the path I fled, with the hoarse cries of the old woman always leading me on, until presently there came a mingling of other sounds, the trampling of footsteps, the cursing and shouting of a score of men. There were two voices dominating all the tumult: one, deep and threatening, and the other that I knew at once to be that of the little maid.

"Ods my life!" said the rogue harshly: "You near the end of your tether, mistress. You meet your fate lightly. I doubt you do not think how you are to pay for those blows you gave me."

"I would I had thrust the point at you," she said.

"You will cry mercy anon. You jade! You will crawl on your knees and pray for pity."

"I will pray one mercy first," she said hotly. "Let them set me afore you with a sword and I will abide the rest."

There was a great roar went up at that. I think the wreckers would have done as she asked, but the fates chose that moment to thrust the old nurse in their midst. I had gotten to the end of the path and I saw her dart forward, clawing wildly at the throat of De Lorimer.

He stumbled and fell in trying to avoid her, and the little maid uttered a cry of delight to see him so scurvily

treated. The rogue was up again at once, his sword out, and he struck so furious a blow that the old woman fell dead on the instant.

I had gotten to the hedge now and was watching my chance to break in upon them. The berserk fit had passed into a cold rage that left me cautious. I would give my life for the little maid, but not in a blind rush. That only if all else failed.

And so I followed them to the end of the path, where they stayed by the side of a huge walled cistern, five feet deep in water.

"Who will bowsen the wench?" snarled De Lorimer. "The man that leaps into the pit shall be captain next to me, with a double share in all we take."

"Heart o' me!" roared one of the rogues. "I'll bowsen her." And in he went, going overhead in his reckless plunge and coming up with the water pouring down his dirty cheeks.

"I'll take it out of the wench for that," he cried savagely. "And 'tis plaguey cold here and I'll take it out of her for that, too. Thrust her down, I say."

"She hath still a chance," said De Lorimer with a horrible kindness, and he placed her at the edge of the cistern with her back to it. "Harkee, mistress. They have haply not dealt with any mad people in your time. Know you what this bowsening is?"

"'Tis a better fate than wearing your ring," quoth the maid gallantly.

"When my patience is fetched to an end, I will clench my fist, so, and I will strike you so hard on your breast you will fall back into the water. You take me, mistress?"

"I take you for one that hath cheated the gallows."

"Black Simon will meet you in the water. He hath the heaviest hand of all my troop and he will drag you to and fro and thrust you under the water

and beat you until you scream for mercy. Then we will have you here again and strike you over a second time, and so on until you are come to your senses or out of them forever."

Creeping forward, I could see her face. It was deadly pale and the laces at her breast fluttered a little tumultuously. "I have heard all this so often, master cutpurse," she said disdainfully.

He stepped back without a word and swung his fist for the blow, and then I knew the time was come when I must take my chance for good or ill. Ere he could swing his fist forward I stepped from my hiding and touched him on the arm. He turned slowly and looked at me. "What in the fiend's name are you come for?" he growled menacingly.

"I am come to join your troop, captain."

"What set you on the budge?" he sneered. "You are one of the gentry by your velvet coat."

"I doubt you were not born in a hovel yourself, captain. 'Twas the cards put me on the budge if you needs must know. I doubled the ruffe too often and then I halved my father's money bags once; and that was too often."

"You were a fool not to empty them," he said.

"Why, that is work for two of us," I whispered eagerly. "If you are minded to come as far—'tis scarce twoscore miles—I will leave the plunder to you if you will give me a place with your lads. But I must be captain next to you for my pains."

I saw the doubtful glance he cast at Black Simon, who was still in the bowsening pit. "Then 'tis all settled," I said, a little louder. "You keep the plunder for yourself and you make me captain next to yourself."

"What of me?" roared Simon furiously. "Did you not promise me I should be your captain? Let me up and

I will beat a fair bargain from the pair of you."

I do not suppose De Lorimer was minded to make me his lieutenant at all. He went to the edge of the bowsening pit and stooped to whisper to the other. I think he was afraid to help him out and he dared not say much to please him, because I stood shrewdly in the rear, eager to stir either side to a mischief.

"A plague on your whispering!" quoth Simon bitterly. "Help me out, I say. You are but filling us both with lies. 'Tis all of a piece. For a silver piece you would bewray the whole troop."

Some of the rogues were looking askance at De Lorimer, who was plainly ill at ease and stooped again to whisper to Black Simon. I edged closer to the little maid, who was watching me with hope and doubt playing across her face like sun and shadow. "Be ready to run," I whispered.

The quarrel between the captain and his lieutenant was fetching to a head. They had forgotten us who stood around and all the time Simon grew more furious.

"You are no chief of mine," he roared at last. "When I am gotten out of this cursed pit the lads shall make a ring and we will see which uses bilbo best. 'Tis cutters' law that the best blade captains the troop."

Whereat I came closer to De Lorimer and made a merry sign to the rogues that stood around. And without more ado I seized him by the back of his neck and the seat of his side slops and flung him into the bowsening pit.

This was a jest to the liking of the lads. They crowded round the edge of the pit wherein the two men were now fighting furiously. I made a sign to the little maid and we crept swiftly down a side path and got clean away.

I liked not the way the villagers watched us hurry away into the Sea-

weed Forest, for they would surely tell the wreckers. But soon I had other things to trouble me, for the maid, having gone so bravely through her real trials, must needs swoon at what I hoped was the end of them. I fetched a little water and bathed her forehead, so that presently she came to. "What hath happed?" she said faintly.

"Why, I have gotten you safely away," I said: "That much for a start, mistress."

She was sitting with her back to a tree where I had placed her when she fell afainting, but now she sprang up, staring piteously at me.

"When you are rested we will go farther," I urged: "You are scarce safe yet, Mistress Margery."

"You know my name," she whispered, "and you speak like Godfrey."

"Let us go farther," I said gently. "It may be we shall find something. Indeed, I have left a friend in the forest and he waiteth my coming. Yet when we are come, I warrant he will scarce look at me—if you are with me."

She set awalking very swiftly into the forest with her lips closed tightly and her eyes shining. "For indeed," quoth she with a pretty curtsy. "I am consumed with haste to see this friend of thine. I am only afeard my old nurse's prophecy will come to pass ere I learn—what I want to learn——"

"His name is Godfrey Boone," I whispered, and at that we went hot-foot. I had my reason for haste as she also had. Away in the distance I could hear a murmur of rough voices with now and then the stave of a drunken chorus. I knew that the villagers looked on the forest as haunted and were not like to enter it and there was no one else but the wreckers.

"I doubt I can go much farther," sighed the little maid. "Nay, I am all

forspent. Can we not hide till they pass?"

They were not going to pass. The voices were growing fainter instead of louder, and yet I had no satisfaction in the thought. I don't know why, unless that in moments of danger, the senses quicken to dangers that are beyond their normal realization.

But the little maid knew naught of that. The tiredness was all gone from her face in a moment. Her eyes were bright again. She stood with her head bent, not to the side from which the wreckers had been coming, but to the other side.

It seems there are other things than danger that quicken the senses.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY CONCLUDED BY JOHN COLE-CHURCH.

THE little maid went forward swiftly, and presently I, too, heard some one coming toward us. In that intense silence I heard the soft padding of footsteps on the heavy turf. I heard them drawing closer and closer until the sound of them seemed to beat in my ears.

And then I heard a little cry from Mistress Margery, such a cry as a man hears but once in a lifetime. I ran down a side path. I would get the biplane ready for our journey.

After we were gotten safely home I calculated that the place where the little maid met Godfrey, and the village and the clearing wherein the biplane lay, formed the three points of a triangle. The little maid and I came down one side and met Godfrey coming along the other, and the wreckers, traversing the third side, passed us without knowing it. When I got to the clearing they were all gathered about the biplane.

I thought that was the end of all our travels. De Lorimer and Black Simon, both somewhat damaged, but appar-

ently the best of friends again, were pulling recklessly at the levers to solve the mystery and the others were no less active.

But three or four of them stood a little apart, stooping over something. They separated suddenly and I shrank back with terror at my heart. I turned and crept back swiftly along the path down which I had come.

They were deceived by my quietness. Godfrey must needs present me first to Mistress Margery with the most exaggerated compliments. Indeed it seems they had made a conspiracy to see which of them could flatter me most. "And now," quoth he, "we will have your news, for I see you have something."

"Why, we are like to stay here for the rest of our lives," I said grimly. "The wreckers are all about the biplane."

Godfrey shrugged his shoulders. I do not think he cared what happened while he had his little maid by his side.

"We are not out of danger," I told him.

"Why, as to that——" he said, very happily, and he cast a glance at Margery and she at him.

I begged they would climb to a cunning hiding-place overhead, nearly twenty feet over the ground and easily reached by the trees. As for myself, I would stay a while and watch what the wreckers were doing.

"I will take Mistress Margery's tawny cloak," I said quietly: "'Tis the same color as the seaweed trees. My black velvet stands out too plainly."

With the tawny cloak pulled closely about me, I hurried back to the clearing. The wreckers had turned away from the biplane and were gathered around the great bloodhound they had fetched from the Manor House. That was the danger I had seen, and I planned to draw the beast away by using Mistress Margery's tawny cloak.

The animal must have led them on a false scent that ended at the biplane and now it was casting about for a new direction. To and fro it ran, with its great ears trailing to the ground. I could hear it snuffling and mouthing at the turf, and see its bloodshot eyes.

It plunged suddenly into the path Godfrey had taken when he left the biplane. That would have led it straight to the hiding place of the two people I had sworn to myself to protect at any cost. I left the path and crashed into the heavy undergrowth to head it off.

As I broke into the path the hound came swinging round the corner, scarce ten yards away. He lifted his head and sent up a great bell-like roar, and I turned back into the underbrush with the animal almost at my heels.

I got back to the other path first, but the hound was right after me, whining and snuffling, his eyes livid and his jaws slobbering. I turned and thrust at him, holding my sword with both hands. He was springing even as I thrust and the point of the blade spit-
ted him so that we fell in a heap together. Before I could disengage, the wreckers were upon me and had beaten me to the ground again. They were led by Black Simon, whose uncouth bellowings filled the forest.

"Bring un back," he roared. "Capt'n will be like sunshine when he sees what we ha' gotten for him. Bring un back."

I was taken to the place where De Lorimer waited with the rest of his troop. One of them was carrying a length of rope he had taken from the biplane, and he began quietly to knot a loop at one end of it. De Lorimer himself helped to throw the other end across a high overhanging branch.

"Put the noose o'er his neck," he said, his face all twisted into a diabolical smile. "This time we will talk."

"Hang un first and then talk to un," growled Simon.

But De Lorimer had his private interests to serve. "Where is the wench?" he snarled suddenly.

"Not in the bowsening pit," I told him, and the retort brought a roar of laughter from the crowd.

"You had best get to your hanging, cap'n," quoth one of them grimly. "This lad would unpin his shroud to gibe at you."

"Gi'e un a chance," urged another. "Let un fight for's life. 'Tis cutters' law."

"Then you must let me choose my man," I said eagerly. "I will fight your captain or I will swing."

"Well said!" they shouted and would have had De Lorimer unloose me, but he only called furiously to the rogue that held me to swing me up. I felt the rope tightening about my throat, and then there came a cry of surprise and Godfrey walked into the middle of the crowd. And after a little pause came Mistress Margery, very slowly but with a fine courage shining in her eyes.

Godfrey cast away the rope from my neck and so calmly that none could say him nay. "Harkee, lads," quoth he, "'tis pirates' law all the world over that the best blade leads the troop."

"Not here," muttered Black Simon surlily.

"'Tis for you to make it so."

De Lorimer stood biting his nails and staring at Godfrey.

"If you let this greasy cutpurse lead you," continued the latter, "he will find a gallows for you ere ever he finds a pinch of courage for himself."

"Ha' done," growled Simon. "Take your own sword and end him if you be se minded."

Godfrey said no more. He threw off his doublet and took his naked sword in his hand and then he walked to De Lorimer and beat him across the face with the back of his hand.

The ring was formed in an instant.

De Lorimer pulled off his coat with some show of courage and laid his sword against that of Godfrey. "If I win," he said hoarsely, "I hang the pair of you."

"Ha'n't won yet," said Black Simon stolidly, and at that De Lorimer turned almost despairingly to his task and thrust at Godfrey in a manner that might well have ended the fight ere 'twas well started.

The blades ran together to the hilts and Godfrey stepped back to disengage. I think the wrecker thought his enemy was giving way, for he attacked him furiously. He thrust again and again, but the thin strip of steel—for Godfrey's blade was but a bodkin by comparison—followed his sword like a serpent, writhing and twisting to meet every thrust.

Then for a moment he hesitated, and in that moment he died. Godfrey had been watching his eyes all the time, and at that sign of hesitation, he sprang forward in his turn and sent in a score of thrusts that beat back De Lorimer as many paces. And then he, too, hesitated and seemed to waver.

The wrecker lunged wildly, as 'twas meant he should, and at that moment Godfrey swerved aside and sent in so terrible a thrust that it left six inches of steel in De Lorimer's throat, with the other half of the sword snapped off in Godfrey's hand.

"Pass the captain," quoth Black Simon. "I'll wager my next share of plunder he'll die no more. Guard yourself, Master Stranger."

"I have no quarrel with you."

"Nor I with you," grinned the rogue, "but only one can be captain, d'ye see?"

"And that's you," said one of the others. "We want no gentry to lead us. Swing 'em up and be damned to them."

They had already gotten the rope about my neck again and were drag-

ging Godfrey to the next tree, when the little maid startled us all with a shrill cry.

"The prophecy! The waters are upon us!"

She was staring wildly at the ground as she spoke. From either side there came a great cataract of water leaping. The clearing in which we stood was high ground but it was already isolated. We had been so engrossed in our own affairs that we had not noticed what was happening beyond. The water was swirling amid the trees that surrounded the clearing, and away in the distance we could hear it booming and crashing as though the whole fury of the ocean were upon us.

The wreckers scattered, calling to each other to get to the village and secure their horses. I think they meant to ride to the Swamp Lands where their rafts lay, but if so it was already hopeless. But of that I knew nothing. The water was rising swiftly as I threw the rope from my neck. Godfrey and I took the little maid between us and we fought our way through the torrent, which was already to our waists.

We saw the biplane when we were gotten to the end of the path, and a great cry of despair broke from us, for it seemed that our last hope was gone. The clearing where it lay must have been lower ground, for it was already flooded so high that it took us overhead while we were still a score of feet away.

"We must get there," said Godfrey hoarsely. "The machine came down on a little plateau scarce its own length and the engines will be dry."

But it was beyond us and the water was rising steadily. Soon the engines would be submerged and that would be the end of everything. We could see the great planes shining against the sunlight, with the water flowing along their lower surfaces.

Godfrey suddenly flung himself into the torrent and thrust his way toward a huge plank that tossed aimlessly twenty paces from where we stood. He was back almost at once, pushing the plank before him and calling to the little maid to throw herself upon it. I plunged in and steadied it at the other end and the little maid did as he told her, springing down and lying flat on her face on the great piece of wood.

We reached the plateau where the biplane lay, and even as we helped the little maid aboard, it came to me that the machine was only built to carry two persons. Godfrey was by Margery's side in a moment, with his hand on the levers, and I stood there waiting.

The droning of the propeller rose above the swirling and roaring of the waters. The great machine began to stir. Godfrey turned suddenly and saw me standing there. "Get in!" he roared.

"You can't carry three!"

"I must! I won't go without you!"

It was no time to argue. I sprang in just as the biplane moved away. It lifted a few inches and fell, almost at the edge of the water, and then it swept up into the air in one tremendous spring that took us a hundred feet high.

We beat steadily toward the open sea. Below us we could see the yellow seaweed creeping above the tops of the trees, with the water shining below. Away to the front there stretched the vast belt of Swamp Lands, glittering like gold in the sunlight, but with great arms of the sea thrusting it aside in every direction. The old black-timbered galleons and frigates and wind-jammers, the funneled steamships, and the long-hulled yachts, were rocking uneasily, stirring from a sleep that had lasted in some cases for centuries.

"That is the end of America," sighed the little maid.



Soldiers and Sailors Personal Relief Section



Strange Devices Sold by Fakers as Military Insignia.

STRANGE and weird devices adorn the left chest of the American soldier in uniform these days. Along the line of the top of the blouse pocket are displayed particolored ribbons of vast splendor and plausible explanation.

The principal reason for their existence is that the government has always allowed veterans of campaigns or phases of the army's history to wear such decorations in commemoration of their services. The reason that they are somewhat ridiculous at the present moment is that the army has not yet published the specifications of the ribbons and medals which are to signify participation in the military events of the last two years.

All over the city unscrupulous or misinformed dealers are selling a strange combination of colors in vertical stripes to soldiers, telling them that it is the "authorized ribbon" to show "service with the Allies." It is an unsymmetrical row of colors intended to denote the flags of all the nations which fought against the boche. Another decoration of the same sort, which is generally worn by men who ought to know better, is a red, white, and blue ribbon which the wearer will tell you

"stands for service in France." It does not—yet. Whether it will later depends upon the action of the war department. The Army and Navy Stores, Inc., an organization officered and managed by officers of the regular army, has been seeking for weeks to get the specifications for the proper ribbons to show service on the allied side and in France, England, Belgium, and Italy. The designs are not yet promulgated.

The wearing of these unauthorized ribbons by a man still in the service means that he may at any minute be halted by an inspector and find himself in martial trouble. It also means that he is the patron of a faker. A discharged soldier may wear anything he likes—even the badge which proves he is a faker's sucker.

The badges which may properly up to date be worn by soldiers because of service in the European war are those which show the officer or man has been awarded the Medal of Honor with the thanks of congress, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Certificate of Especially Meritorious Service or one of the foreign orders such as the French Croix de Guerre.

General Order 48 of the war department, dated April 9, 1919, authorized the issue to every man in service between April 6, 1917, and November

11, 1918, of the Victory Medal. This is to be:

A Winged Victory on the obverse side and on the reverse the inscription "The Great War for Civilization" and the names and arms of the different Allied and Associated Nations.

The obverse side, as explained in an interview with General Peyton C. Marsh, a few days later, is to be signed differently by each nation. But the face of the medal and the ribbon by which it is hung from the pin clasp will be the same for the soldiers of all the Allies and the United States. It will be, as officially described, "a double rainbow placed with red in the middle." Just how wide the rainbow stripes shall be and just how many colors of the spectrum are to be included in it has not yet been divulged by the war department.

If a man has participated in any one of fourteen battles which are set forth in orders he is entitled to wear one three-sixteenth-inch bronze star on his service ribbon for each battle. If he has been cited for his conduct in these battles, but has not received the Medal of Honor, D. S. C., or D. S. M., he wears a silver star in the place of the bronze star.

If a man has not been in action, but has served in France, Italy, Great Britain, Russia, or Siberia, he may wear a ribbon of a type which has not yet been published.

The fakers are selling a blue, white, and red ribbon under the pretense that it is the French service ribbon for Americans. It is actually a ribbon authorized last year for men wounded in France. The authority for that use of it was rescinded when the gold stripe on the right sleeve of the coat was adopted as a wound symbol, and those who are now selling it as a French service ribbon are merely shifting "dead stock" to "easy marks."

By the same token every man who has served in the army during the world war will receive a button furnished by the government to wear in his coat lapel. The fakers have buttons in a hundred varieties. The government button, which any discharged soldier may have by showing his discharge certificate at the proper recruiting agencies, will cost him nothing. It is a wreath surrounding a star with the letters U. S. superimposed. If his certificate shows he was wounded in service the star will be of silver. Otherwise it will be of bronze. Anybody who wears any of the other gilt and silver and A. E. F. lapel buttons simply shows that he thinks more of himself and the fakers than he does of United States service.

Extra Mileage Order Won by Service Men.

The Private Soldiers and Sailors' Legion has won its first legal skirmish in the effort to obtain about forty million dollars which it is claimed the government owes for mileage for discharged soldiers.

Marvin Gates Sperry, national president of the Legion, recently petitioned the supreme court of the District of Columbia for a writ of mandamus against General Herbert M. Lord, Director of Finance of the War Department, to compel him to reimburse them the difference between three and a half cents a mile each as allowed and five cents per mile which was authorized by the last congress.

Chief Justice McCoy has issued the following order:

"The United States of America, on the relation of Marvin Gates Sperry, petitioner, versus Herbert M. Lord, Director of Finance, General Staff, War Department, respondent.

"Upon consideration of the petition in the above-entitled cause, it is this

fifth day of May, 1919, ordered that a rule issued to the respondent requiring him to show cause on the ninth day of May instant, at the opening of the court, why the writ of mandamus, as prayed by the said petition, should not issue; provided that a copy of this rule is served on the said respondent on or before the day of May instant."

Former Congressman Ernest Lundeen, of Minnesota, is counsel for the Legion.

"None of the officers of the Legion, nor myself, receive a penny for our services," he said. "We are simply all working together for the rights in this case of the private soldiers and sailors.

"It is no attempt to harass any one. The boys were paid off at the rate of three and one-half cents per mile. Congress granted them five cents per mile. It will average about ten dollars, due each and every soldier. On the basis of four million troops you will see then it would run up into big figures—some forty million dollars. But it is their due, and it is all we are after—to see the private soldier and sailor gets what is coming to him. It was the privates that won the war, and you might say that they are again victorious in the first legal battle of ours to get what is their legal due."



Questions and Answers.

PRIVATE R. B. S.—Could you advise me on the proper method to secure my discharge? I am a mechanic and I have an excellent position waiting for me in civil life. I have spoken to the top sergeant, but so far nothing has happened. This is a serious matter with me because I wish to get married after my discharge.

Answer: The only way to do business in the army is to follow regulations. Write a military letter through channels requesting that you be dis-

charged. Give the reasons for same as briefly and simply as possible. Talk to your company clerk and learn the exact method of writing a military letter. I will send you a model if you require it. Moss' Army Paper Work gives good samples. Follow instructions carefully and address your communication to your immediate commanding officer with the request that it be forwarded through military channels to the proper authority.

INTERESTED.—Could you inform me as to the number of casualties suffered by the United States during the war?

Answer: The approximate number is about 290,000. I cannot give exact figures because every now and then the war department announces a new list. Watch the papers and you will secure this information.

CORPORAL ALEC R.—In answer to your request I must say that it is impossible for me to tell you when any given unit will be mustered out. Address such requests to the war department.

CURIOUS.—I have been discharged for three months, and recently tried to secure a job. Another discharged soldier beat me to it on the grounds that he had been across. I was a volunteer myself, and I would have gladly gone over, but unfortunately was never sent. I put in two solid years. What would you do?

Answer: This is a hard problem. I would hesitate to choose between the relative merits of you two men because I have never met either one of you. My advice would be to go somewhere else. Perhaps the man you speak of had been introduced by a friend. You may not have been known where you tried to secure employment. If you don't succeed in getting a place take the matter up with the U. S. Employment Service, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, or the Y. M. C. A. There is

a Jewish Welfare League that is also doing good work for discharged soldiers.

DISCHARGED.—I am in a peculiar position. I was discharged recently as a lieutenant and accepted work under a man who was at one time a private in my company. He is taking advantage of his opportunities to lord it over me, and I wonder whether I should resent the matter or merely ignore it.

Answer: This is a problem! I am afraid I shall have to leave the settlement entirely with you because you know best about the position you hold. A number of these cases have been reported to me during the past few months. I can only say that life has a peculiar habit of reversing conditions every now and then.

BERTRAND L. D.—I have been discharged for five months, and during this time accepted three separate positions, each one proving tiresome. I am unmarried and without relatives. I have thought for some time of going back into service. Please give me some pointers. I am an experienced machinist and know a great deal about electricity in an amateur way. I saw foreign service and was a non-com when discharged.

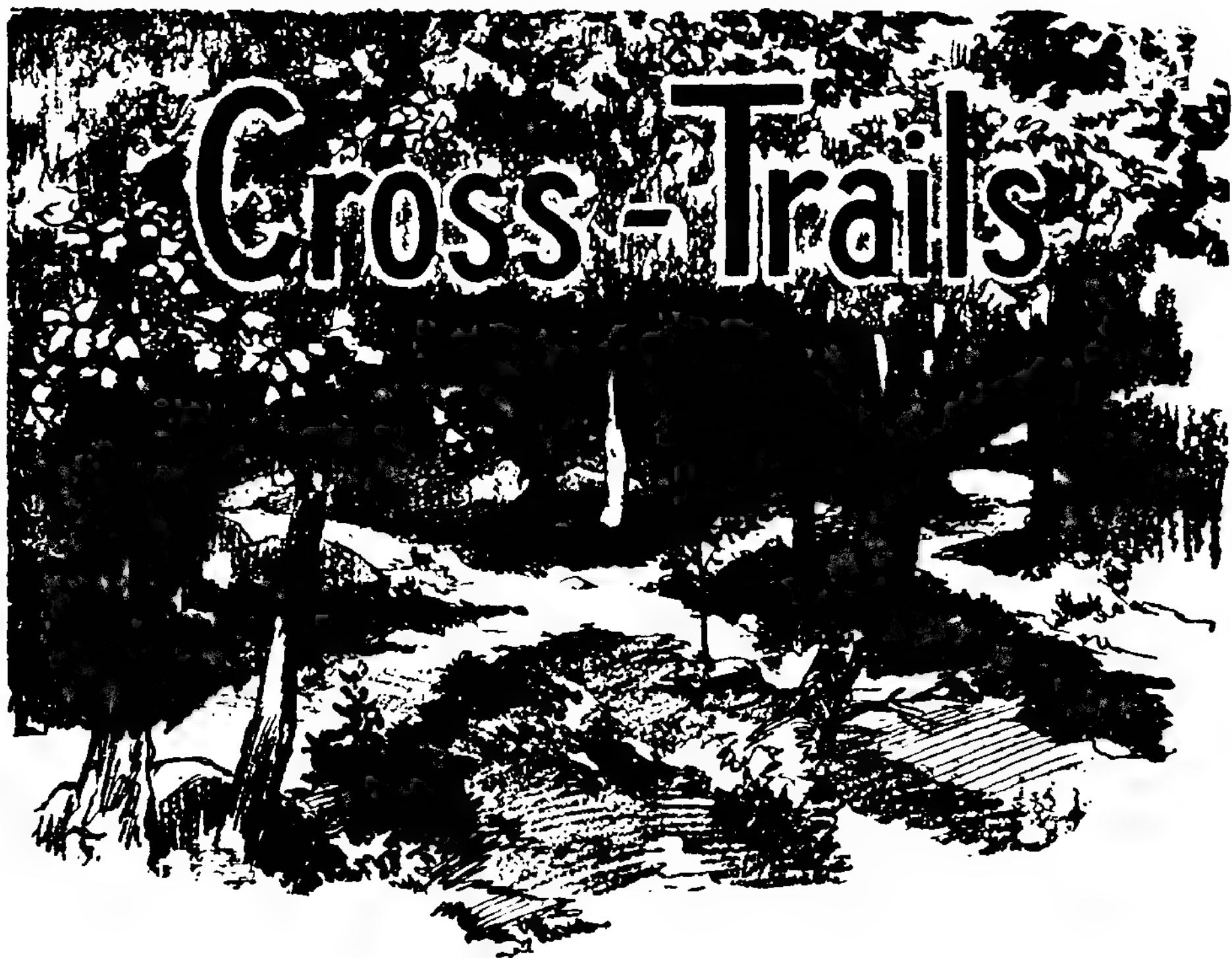
Answer: It would seem to me that the best thing for you to do would be to enter service again. There is a good living and an excellent future for a man in the army if he likes the life. I do not know of any one I respect any more than the older non-com who has four or five fogies to his credit. The army

is going to be a much better place for a man with ambition in the future. The war has taught us many things. If you are happy as a soldier and think that it provides a living to your satisfaction I would without hesitation recommend reënlistment.

ROY LE MOYNE.—I saw active service and in one of the last engagements was unfortunate enough to lose my leg. As you know, I have contributed some things to THE THRILL BOOK in the form of prose and verse. I am not unknown to you, therefore. I am receiving no money from the government, and I am experiencing difficulty in securing a position. It seems to me that I am entitled to a regular sum from Uncle Sam because I lost my limb in action and not as the result of any carelessness on my part. Can you advise me?

Answer: My dear friend, Le Moyne, I want to say first that I have enjoyed your verses greatly, and I hope that more of them will appear in THE THRILL BOOK. Now about your trouble. You should sit right down and write to the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, Claims Section. It is not necessary to hire a lawyer. Simply lay your case before them, inclosing a copy of your discharge certified by a notary public. Explain every point that you can think of, and be sure and give your unit, period of service, where wounded, action taken, if any, et cetera. The Bureau will furnish you with forms. If you fail in this write me again and I will see what I can do for you.





HOW seldom a writer succeeds in describing the emotions of a child! We have read a great many stories dealing with children and have been disheartened at their utter lack of understanding. The fact is that the infant mind is capable of thinking about things in a way that would surprise the old-maidish story-tellers. It isn't necessary to go the limit and make children into grown-ups, either. That was why we were pleased to get hold of "The Wax Doll," by Ezra Putnam. With fine taste and amazing knowledge this writer has made a child the main figure in a tale that is both unusual and pathetic. Confidentially, we must admit, that we do not like to read gloomy fiction all the time, but now and again when we strike a bit of work that is so good we cannot decline to publish it we are not going to let anything stand in its way. **THE THRILL BOOK** is the one magazine where the extraordinary

story is given first place. Our ideal is to forget all the other periodicals and give our readers the kind of reading matter that it is impossible to find anywhere else.

THE Opium Ship," by H. Bedford-Jones, ends in the next issue. If you haven't been reading this serial we certainly advise you to secure the back numbers or glance through the synopsis in this number and begin it at once. If you can't get back numbers from your news dealer write to us for them.

IN the next issue of **THE THRILL BOOK** we are going to print a complete novel by William Wallace Cook, called "The Man from Thebes." It is not necessary to introduce William Wallace Cook. He is a writer whose work has been before the public for many years. We are not sparing time or expense to secure for you the best that can be

found anywhere. It is an amusing tale of how patent medicines restored life to an Egyptian king. You will enjoy his exciting adventures and the many curious things that happen to a man who has been dead for twenty-five hundred years.

ONE of the important policies of THE THRILL BOOK is to secure the best serials that we can get. We don't want the usual tales that appear regularly in other magazines. What would be the use? What we are keen to find are those that are entirely out of the rut into which modern fiction has fallen. Francis Stevens has written one beginning in the next number that for amazing situations and bizarre plot is not to be duplicated. It is called "The Heads of Cerberus." Go to your news dealer at once and order a copy so that you won't miss a line of it. If you have ever read Edgar Allan Poe's "The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym," and liked it as much as we did you will appreciate a serial that goes even beyond that, and instead of going to the south pole carries one to an unknown land where people are numbered rather than named and where everything that we are accustomed to seeing around daily is reversed. The interesting thing about it all is the atmosphere of probability that surrounds the entire tale from beginning to end. We enjoy reading a good story more than anything else we can think of at this moment, but when the story holds us spellbound we thank our stars that there are some writers who know the game.

YOU will read a great many letters in this issue from our readers. Since March 1st, when the initial number appeared on the news stands, we have received over three thousand letters from all over the world! Many of them have praised our work, others have criticized us in a serious way, but

so far not one reader has failed to understand the ideal that carries us on. It was such an unusual venture that for a long time we were not able to make writers believe that at last there was a magazine that "dared" print mysterious, pseudo-scientific, occult, fantastic, and bizarre yarns. When we convinced them that we were serious we began getting what we wanted. Read "When Dead Lips Speak," by Anna Alice Chapin, in this number, and let us know whether you have ever run across a more startling thing. Also, "The Fear," by Carleton W. Kendall, and "The Kiss of the Silver Flask," by Evangeline Weir. It is a lot of pleasure to bring to our readers stories of so high a caliber. After all, the workman is proud of a task well done.

OUR readers will recall that in our last issue we published a short story called "The Whispering from the Ground," by Don Mark Lemon, a gripping little tale with a unique dénouement. "The Spider and the Fly," by the same author, is an even more striking story of the weird, the fantastic, the horrible. Read it with several hours intervening between its conclusion and your bedtime, for otherwise you will undoubtedly pass an uncomfortable night. It is a story of a woman who turns into—well, of course, we are not going to tell you, because, if we did, you would miss the pleasure and the excitement of finding that out for yourself. But, remember, give yourself four or five hours before bedtime so that your nerves have a chance to steady themselves.

How About It?

THE consciousness of one's own individuality is not a simple thing to attain. Do you realize that the most difficult object of human ambition is an adjusted idea of self?

We take ourselves quite seriously. The last thing in the world that we see is a fault of our own. It is easy enough to pick the mote out of our neighbor's eye.

We can sit back in righteous ease and select at random the glaring weakness of those around us, but when it comes to self-appraisal we fail miserably.

We lack the power to stand off and view ourselves objectively. Why? Simply because most of us have neglected doing so for no other reason than the fact that we considered it unnecessary. We are content to drive along in the same old harness down the unchanging road at a snail's pace, never looking behind us and never lifting our heads to look beyond. Suddenly something hits us. An accident of some kind occurs. Our harness is torn from our backs. The unseen driver disappears or is killed. We are left stranded on the roadway, dazed, uncertain, pushed to one side while the traffic rushes by in utter ignorance of our plight. How pitiful!

Had we taken the time to study ourselves we would have known all there was to know about who drove us, the kind of harness we wore, and the roadway down which we cantered at a lazy pace. We would not have depended upon circumstances so utterly and completely. We could have taken what lay at hand and made a harness or left it behind us for good and all and taken to the highway, free, determined to stand upon our own good feet.

The study of self is the best way to begin a bit of work. If you take a position get a slant on your own responsibilities and a knowledge of what you are able to accomplish. Know yourself from stem to stern.

After you have learned all you can about yourself take the rest for granted and go ahead full speed. In other

words, if an occasion arises where you are called upon to do something beyond your understanding of your own powers *take a chance*. Often the use of unknown powers brings them out.

I hold a theory that in every man or woman there are innate all the powers of the race. Chance, opportunity, or fate—call it what you will—cuts largely in bringing them out, but the greatest force is will.

What we will we can do. Carry this farther. You can actually create powers out of the shadowy beginnings of initiative that stir within you.

I could prove this if I take the time, but I will suggest a method for you to try which will convince you of the truth of the above if you obey my instructions exactly.

Let us say you are a clerk in an office. Suddenly the man above you is taken sick and you are called upon to take his place. Now don't go in fear, in trembling to his desk. Approach it as though you knew all there was to be known about the work. You will be surprised at the ease with which things open to a courageous mind. Also the other clerks will help you when they observe that you possess self-confidence. Suppose you did fail—what of it? Are there not hundreds of other chances? Say this to yourself.

You will find that in you there are lying magical forces of strength that have been waiting for an opening to spring into being.

Naturally, if you allow yourself to go to sleep and lose all ambition there will come a time when the forces will die within you and you will be unable to get out of the rut.

I would advise every minor clerk who reads these pages; every mechanic; every workman; every professional man; to take one chance, one leap into the unknown just to see what it brings forth. If he tries this and fails I will

be glad if he will write to me. I guarantee that if he is candid and tells me the truth about himself I will be able to point out to him a way by which he can win the next time.

I wish to say here that often a man's weaknesses are the best things he has. The thing that counts is the policy followed by the will to carry out this system of what you believe you should do.

How interesting it is to open up one's personality and dig down to find out what lies there unseen previously. It is so easy. Observe your own actions. Weigh your successes and failures in equal scales. Don't close your mind to any opening. Don't listen to carping criticism. Don't worry too much about the other fellow.

Don't waste time in trying to do something that you don't like. Don't hunt up uncongenial companions. Find your own set and pick out the best and stand by them.

Don't regard your opinion of yourself as too high. As you regard yourself so shall the rest. Don't be afraid of the darkness. Try anything once. If it doesn't work don't do it the second time unless you are sure you did not make a real attempt.

Don't go home and forget your work. If it's that kind of work then you are not placing your personality in the proper niche. Don't stand around arguing with unsuccessful people. Find those who succeed. Study them and compare yourself. Then don't run away frightened.

Interesting Letters from the Readers.

DEAR SIR: To pass a dull evening I recently picked up a copy of your new magazine, *THE THRILL BOOK* (March 15th copy), and before I knew it I had gone clear through it, and enjoyed it every step of the way. If all copies are as good as that one, I am sure you will grow fast.

I hope you will publish more of Howard

Dwight Smiley's articles. They sure are good. Give us more of his novels. Very truly yours,

C. L. BOONE.

Sales Manager, Chase Brothers Co., Rochester, N. Y.

GENTLEMEN: I understand you are about to publish a magazine to be called *THE THRILL BOOK*. If so, "The Green Eye," the inclosed story, may fit very well. I guarantee the reading of it will give a thrill of some variety.

"The Green Eye" was not written with a belief of its selling. There is hardly, I think, an American publication that would accept it with the possible exception of your new magazine.

Pretty-pretty, tinkle-tinkle, happy-ending, wedding-chimes, slush-gush, and piffle! That's what's wanted.

Bah!

When are American editors going to try and lift the reading public to an appreciation of something besides literary garbage?

I believe *THE THRILL BOOK* will make a decided appeal to the thousands who are sick of the drivel the magazines have been offering.

I hope the shop talk I hear about *THE THRILL BOOK* is true.

Anyway, please look over "The Green Eye."

It made two editors write me letters about it. Of course, they were obliged to reject it. Their magazines stand for the mush a certain type of mentality (?) gorges. Sincerely,

AUGUSTIN LARDY.

693 West End Avenue, New York City.

NOTE: *We have purchased this story. It will appear in a future issue. It is a great piece of fiction.*—THE EDITOR.

Editor of *THE THRILL BOOK*.

I'm glad to know there's such a magazine out as *THE THRILL BOOK*. I have often wondered (doubtless like thousands of other people) why one could never find a magazine with real mystery stories. Mystery is the very spice of life, and without it no story is really a story. To my mind, the more mystery the greater the fascination in art, literature, and life. Success to *THE THRILL BOOK*.

JAMES WARNACK.

Los Angeles, Cal.

Editor of *THE THRILL BOOK*.

DEAR SIR: I want to congratulate you on giving us something a little different in the way of a magazine. I was particularly interested in the story taking the initial pages in the March 1st issue—it has the weird "creepy" touch and kept the reader guess-

ing. I shall be on the lookout for future issues. Very truly, MRS. L. A. BROWNELL.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

Yesterday I bought a copy of the May 1st issue of THE THRILL BOOK. Mr. Sheehan's story was all it promised to be in the first installment. I read Mr. Booth's story with the greatest interest. It is a wonderful psychological study. Believe me, with best wishes, yours very sincerely, GREYE LA SPINA.
116 Nassau Street, New York City.

Editor of THE THRILL BOOK

DEAR SIR: There! Enough of fooling. I do like THE THRILL BOOK immensely. That "Hank of Yarn" is better, to my notion, than the much vaunted "Piece of String" by Guy de Maupassant. I think the thrill idea great, for men are only children of a larger growth, and we all like to feel creeps up our back bones. Cordially yours,
Atlanta, Ga. BEULAH R. STEVENS.

Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

It is good news that you intend running a department of letters from readers. A department of that sort surely does tend to make firm adherents of many readers who would otherwise never "see themselves in print," and, besides, brings in a personal element that is to the great advantage of any magazine. With best wishes, very sincerely yours, GERTRUDE BENNETT.
Philadelphia, Pa.

DEAR SIR: I have been very interested in your magazine. It is a vehicle greatly needed at this time. I have read two numbers, and enjoyed them immensely, especially the story by Claire Douglas Stewart, which I thought one of the finest stories I had read for a long time. Very truly,
Venice, Cal. PAUL ANNIXTER.

Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

I am inclosing my personal check for \$1.80 for six months' subscription to THE THRILL BOOK. Yours very truly, J. LORENZ.
Evansville, Ind.

DEAR SIR: Yes, I aim to subscribe regularly; for, even though I shall not be here at all times, my sister will receive THE THRILL BOOK, and she certainly appreciates it for all it is worth. I have shown my copy to quite a number, and all have assured me that they'll turn in an early subscription. I'm keeping close tabs on everything that takes its place in THE THRILL BOOK. Sincerely,
WILLIAM RAND LOESCHER.
Holyoke, Mass.

GENTLEMEN: I think your THRILL BOOK is great. Wishing you success, I remain, yours,
F. WHITCHURST.
Verdun, P. Q., Montreal.

Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

DEAR SIR: Permit me to felicitate with you on your unique departure from "established" methods in providing entertainment for the reading public. Although a woman, I fail to see any point or purpose in half the usual magazine stories being published nowadays. They are weak, lame, insipid, distorted efforts, thinly veneered junk, which might find better destiny in a wastebasket than in a magazine.

Any one who thinks a woman doesn't like red-blooded stories, with the tang of mystery, thrilling adventures, ghostly horror, and the lure of the occult, doesn't know the feminine mind. The sickly sentimental stuff is nauseating—we get so much of that without needing a magazine! Give us live-wire stories; make us realize that we are human, not mere petticoated dolls. You are doing good work along "different" lines, and I must compliment you. I look for the discovery of a new Poe or Maupassant or O'Brien in your wonderfully timely magazine, although I would like to see it larger.

Here's wishing you every success—you deserve it.
MRS. THELMA DALE.
Hoboken, N. J.

Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

DEAR SIR: Am writing you in regard to your THRILL BOOK, which in my estimation is the greatest little book of its kind. It is the one magazine that interests me to the end, and I wish to have a few of the back numbers if possible, so please send me six of them. I am an overseas soldier, and have been wounded and gassed twice, but for all my experience I find more than one "thrill" stored in your very interesting little book. I am crippled, and believe me, I find many a happy moment in THE THRILL BOOK when I feel like reading, so I wish you all the success that THE THRILL BOOK deserves. Yours for THE THRILL BOOK in haste, I am, respectfully yours,

PRIVATE EMILE KAUSSIAN.
Lowell, Mass.

STREET & SMITH, New York.

GENTLEMEN: It is very seldom that I write a testimonial, and when I do, it is for something that strikes me "just right," among which is your splendid publication, THE THRILL BOOK.

The stories are unusual, bright, clean, and fine. As long as they are kept up to the

present standard I will boost it wherever I can.

My wife also likes it very much, and we look forward to each issue. We have but one severe criticism to make, and that is, it should be published every week; two weeks is too long to wait for such excellent pleasure as **THE THRILL BOOK** offers.

Wishing you success, I am, yours sincerely,
Rochester, N. Y. **FRANK W. SCHRADER.**

Interesting Bits from Our Readers' Letters.

I am pleased to learn that you are enlarging your magazine, and will await with much interest your promised surprise.

Rochester, N. Y. **C. L. B.**

DEAR SIR: It gives me pleasure to call to your attention some of the fine points of the magazine which you publish.

Brooklyn, N. Y. **R. S. O.**

I have been an ardent reader of **THE THRILL BOOK** since the fourth issue, and have secured the first three numbers. These I am having bound. The new size is more convenient. It is larger, better, and every issue makes me feel that it is about the most unusual proposition I have ever struck.

New York, N. Y. **E. M.**

The boys are reading **THE THRILL BOOK** here in camp with great pleasure. The copy I brought with me from town is literally worn to tatters.

A Southern Camp. **CORP. E. P.**

Your magazine is a gem—a cameo, I would call it. Some writing and editing going on

there! I am a newspaper man, an editor myself, and I think I know the goods when I see them.

ARTHUR N——.

Washington, D. C.

Congratulations from an "old magazine fiend." You are giving us real stuff. Keep it up.

INTERESTED.

San Francisco, Cal.

Why don't you publish more of the Perley Poore Sheehan stories? We like them out here.

THE TEN-SPOT CLUB.

Manilla, P. I.

You ask me who my favorite writers in **THRILL BOOK** are. It's hard to say: I haven't read but one poor yarn so far—that was pretty bad. I might list Clarence L. Andrews, Frederic Booth, Chester L. Saxby, Robert W. Sneddon, Harcourt Farmer, Tod Robbins, L. J. Beeston, and Clyde Broadwell among my special favorites. The best story so far is "The Bibulous Baby," by Tod Robbins. I mean, as an unusual type. "Nothing But Dust," by Frederic Booth, was a hummer. I recall now that his "Supers" was selected by O'Brien as one of the best stories of 1916. I liked "The Seventh Glass," by J. U. Giesy, and "When Ghosts Walk," by Christopher Bannister. Some of these days I am going to give you a detailed criticism of all that has appeared in **THE THRILL BOOK**.

PROFESSOR M. R. O.

A Western University.

My only criticism is that you do not go into the occult far enough. Why not go the limit and give us pure stories of spiritualism and mysticism? After all, there must be a large public for this. Think it over, Mr. Editor.

OBSERVER

Chicago, Ill.



Around the World

France Plans to Spend Billion in Battle Area.

The expenditure of more than 6,000,000,000 francs—\$1,200,000,000—in the reorganization of communication in North-eastern France is planned by Albert Clavelle, minister of public works. In a report to President Poincaré the minister says that more than 900,000,000 francs should be expended for the construction of new main railroad lines, more than 875,000,000 francs for the construction of local railway lines, more than 350,000,000 francs for the reconstruction of waterways, more than 200,000,000 francs for building and rebuilding roads and more than 600,000,000 for the reconstruction and improvement of maritime ports.

In the fighting area of Northern France great stretches of railway lines were destroyed and must be rebuilt, as must most of the tunnels. All local railway lines have been destroyed in the regions of Rheims and Laon. The canal system in the battle area also was damaged considerably, 450 bridges and 111 floodgates being destroyed. The ports of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne were damaged to the extent of 100,000,000 francs. The losses in machinery in the occupied area amounted to more than 450,000,000 francs.

Reconstruction and improvements are being carried out in the departments of the Somme, Aisne, Marne, Meurthe, and Moselle. During the war, the minister says, the various armies built more than 1,100 miles of railway.

Church Furnace Acts as Incubator.

Reverend Hadley Alfredton, pastor of the Central Church of Dallas, Texas, likes his eggs three times daily. In fact, he is so fond of the hen fruit that his sagacity led him to store away some thirty dozen perfectly good eggs, gathered from his barnyard during the laying season to guard against the time when his fowls

were not on the job. These eggs he stored in the basement of his little church where they would be safe from molestation.

Every day or so during the past month Reverend Alfredton visited the basement of the church and brought out eggs. Then he was called away for a time. He left positive instructions to the janitor to keep the building warm and his family comfortable during his absence.

When Reverend Alfredton returned he went to the basement of the church to get eggs for his evening meal. Right then he got the surprise of his life.

Instead of finding more than twenty dozen eggs as he had left them he found two hundred nice downy little chickens chirping from the ground and the egg cases.

He made an investigation. Every case was full of chicks. They were singing a song of hunger and wanted a place to snuggle under the wing of a hen.

Woman in Rowboat Tries to Cross Sea.

Speaking of those women who have nerve to spare, but whose judgment may be deficient, consider Victoria Neilsen, who actually began an attempt to row across the Atlantic Ocean in a fifteen-foot boat. She was brought back, but there is every likelihood that she will repeat the attempt unless they catch her again.

Well past middle age and extremely powerful for a woman, Mrs. Neilsen, who is a Dane, was pulling lustily to the eastward and was well out when picked up by the crew of the steam pilot boat "New York." She simply longed to see that dear Denmark, the land of her birth, but with only twenty-five dollars to her name she couldn't buy a ticket. Although homesick and poor, she had nerve and plenty of it. With her little twenty-five dollars she bought a good row boat and started for Denmark.

When the pilot crew picked her up she was ten miles past the Sandy Hook light-ship at the other end of New York Bay. Nobody asked them to interfere, but when they saw a woman rowing out to sea in a little boat they concluded that something must be wrong with the woman.

They took her to a hospital at Staten Island, where she was placed under surveillance. While preparations were being made to transfer her to the observation ward of another hospital she disappeared. Now the police are watching for her, lest she obtain another rowboat and again defy the Atlantic Ocean.

Gold Found in Jar of Preserves.

A jar of plum preserves, put up by her mother in Mississippi more than fifty years ago, proved to be one of the sweetest and most welcome dishes Mrs. J. L. Conkling, of Greenville, Texas, ever opened for breakfast. That jar of preserves was a dish for the gods, and there are many demigods and just plain ordinary citizens who wish they had the entire jar or just enough of the preserves to spread on a slice of bread.

Mrs. Conkling brought the preserves with her when she moved from Mississippi several years ago. Along with it came numerous other jars of good old fruit her mother canned right after the Civil War. The family had been eating the fruit with the greatest relish.

"Well, John, I think I have some of those good old preserves mother put up," said Mrs. Conkling to her husband.

She fussed at the top for some time before she could remove it. Meanwhile John was sipping his coffee and worrying about whether he would get to work on time. Finally Mrs. Conkling got the top off the jar and the "preserves" were musty.

"What is this?" cried Mrs. Conkling as what she thought were plum pits rattled on the platter.

"By the great horn spoon and the wishers of the sacred cow, it's gold," yelled John.

It was gold. There were fives, tens, and

twenties, loads of them. In fact, the jar contained nine hundred and eighty dollars in gold coin.

Three-hundred-pound Preacher Falls in Dough-mixer.

T. J. Rogers, of Atlanta, Ga., a three-hundred-pound negro preacher on Sundays and Wednesday evenings, and an expert dough-mixer at a local bakery on week days, had a close call one morning when he fell in the mixing machine. The machine started right in to mix the Reverend Rogers along with the dough, going at the job with a mechanical thoroughness and a diabolical lack of interest for the reverend's ponderous anatomy. In fact, as Rogers declared later at the receiving clinic of Grady Hospital, "the mis'able thing pretty nigh took him all apart."

Had it not been for the presence of mind of another employee, who stood near by, and who shut down the machinery, Rogers probably would have been sent to the undertaker. One handle of the mixer hit him a severe blow on the head; another one, with its mechanical rapidity, knocked him on the arm, and he was mixed up badly.

He was plastered with very sticky dough from head to foot when the ambulance got him to the hospital, and it was hard to tell whether he was white or black. However, extensive dry-cleaning operations having been made on him, he was doctored and put to bed.

Disinterred Body Weighs Five Hundred Pounds.

A number of years ago Doctor William Smith was married to Miss Louisa Dunbar. She lived in Wheatland Township, Fayette County, Ill. After their marriage the couple moved into Effingham County, where Mrs. Smith died some twelve years ago, with measles, the body being interred near their home. Doctor Smith, who now is a resident of St. Elmo, for some time had wanted to have the body of his wife taken up and taken there.

The disinterment took place a short time ago and was under the direction

of Undertaker Hazzard and his assistants, who went to a cemetery in Wheatland Township for the purpose. The grave being opened, they found the box completely decayed, but the coffin was in a fair state of preservation.

On getting down into the grave to lift the casket to the top they were greatly surprised to find that it was so heavy they could not move it, and they had to call for more help. The coffin was finally lifted from the grave and an investigation was immediately made to ascertain the reason of so much weight.

On opening the coffin it was found that the body had completely petrified—turned to stone. Many who viewed it unite in saying that its form and features were as natural as on the day of the woman's burial, but the entire body was solid rock and without the casket weighed close to five hundred pounds.

Frogs in Spigots.

Residents of Clarkston, Wash., have appealed to State Fish Commissioner L. H. Darwin for some relief from a visitation of frogs. It seems the frogs have taken to joy riding through the town's water mains. People are greeted with the sprightly chirp of frogs when they draw their morning glass of water, and before venturing to take a bath the cautious resident listens for the song of the unbidden guest before taking a plunge. Darwin recommends that bass and pickercel, the natural enemies of frogs, be turned loose in the town's reservoir.

Shows He's Wise Old Horse.

An old gray horse owned by an Alexandria, Ind., transfer barn employee understands the meaning of an alarm bell at railroad crossings, according to one of the drivers. Two years ago a dray drawn by the animal was demolished when it was struck by a freight engine. The horse escaped injury.

The bell at the Broadway crossing of the Big Four Railroad here is out of order at present and rings constantly. Employees of the transfer barn tried to drive the horse over the crossing on two dif-

ferent occasions while the bell was clanging, but they failed.

A Use for Flags.

The Oregon society, Sons of the American Revolution, have placed flags where they will do the most good. They are convinced that the very sight of a beautiful American flag has power to stimulate patriotic emotion and they know patriotic emotion is needed.

Because of this conviction, the organization has presented handsome silk flags to be used in naturalization courts throughout the State during final hearings upon applications for citizenship. In the United States District Court for the State of Oregon, at Portland, the flag is draped over the bench during the hearing of the application, and in another court the judge arranges that the prospective citizen shall stand holding the flag in his left hand while raising the right to take the oath of allegiance to the United States.

This cult of the flag in Oregon had its noblest expression at the public naturalization reception arranged by the bureau of naturalization and the public schools of Oregon as a part of a recent educational conference in Portland. The city auditorium was needed to accommodate the more than four thousand people present. The scene was a most inspiring one. Brilliant flags and eminent men and women conspired together to make it so.

On either side of the stage an enormous American flag was suspended. Just below these, on their standards, were two of the beautiful silk flags presented by the Sons of the Revolution. The galleries were draped with flags, and on a table on the stage were the smaller flags, to be presented to those who that day were to win citizenship. On the stage were those who had been admitted to citizenship during the past year, with their wives and children, an assemblage of over four hundred. On one side, just under the great flag, where the arrangements duplicated the scene of a courtroom, was the group of five men and one woman who were to be publicly examined in citizenship requirements, accompanied by their witnesses.

At the conclusion of the naturalization court, which was presided over by Judge John F. Kavanaugh, with Chief Naturalization Examiner John Speed Smith representing the government, who addressed the new citizens, three little girls dressed in white, one wearing a red sash, the second a white, and the third a blue sash, presented the flags, donated by the Sons of the American Revolution, to the new citizens. Then, under the flags, the whole assembly arose and sang together with great enthusiasm "America" and the "Star-Spangled Banner."

Stops Work.

W. L. Abscher left his farm in Texas when the drought whipped him. He went to Oklahoma City and got a job as motor-man at one hundred and ten dollars a month.

After a winter with influenza in the family his savings were gone. He heard about six dollars a day wages in the oil field. He got a leave of absence to go look for that kind of employment. While in Texas he discovered his land was in the path of a new oil development. He leased the farm for eighty thousand dollars. He had tried in vain to sell the same land for three hundred dollars.

Abscher bade good-by forever to the street-car company.

Horse's Tail Yanked Off by Auto.

John Hamlin's roan mare's tail was jerked out by the roots, his buggy wrecked, and he and his sweetheart severely hurt in a very peculiar accident in Forney, Texas. It all happened when the mare's tail got mixed up with the windshield of a passing automobile.

John had just started out for a drive with his sweetheart. They were moping along the road talking of things which were going to happen in the future. The roan mare had been accustomed to these drives and was taking things easy. In fact, she was taking it so easy that she did not notice another young man and his sweetheart coming in an automobile. But they were coming, and coming at a pretty good clip.

Just as the car was flitting by the roan

mare made a move with her tail to flick a fly from her side. The tail struck in the rods of the auto's windshield—and stuck. The mare's tail was yanked off at the hips and the animal was jerked over into the buggy and laps of Hamlin and his sweetheart. The buggy was wrecked and man and girl went down with it. The mare soon found her bearing, even with the loss of her tail. She rolled off the bruised lovers and they finally got to their feet and staggered to the roadside where they sat down to wait for assistance.

The car went its way with the roan's tail flying in the breeze. Hamlin does not know the occupants of the car. He found the mare's tail a mile down the road. He declares he will now purchase an auto and take his rides in that in the future.

Carpet in House Is Field of Corn.

Last fall Solon Mutsey, of Butler, N. Y., purchased a bushel of popcorn in the ear, took it home and spread it out upon a carpet in a vacant room on the second floor of his house to dry. One night recently Mrs. Mutsey told her husband she had popped the last of the popcorn she had in the pantry, and if he wanted any more he would have to go upstairs and shell some.

Mr. Mutsey went to the upper room for the first time since he placed the corn in it last fall. When he opened the door he was surprised to see numerous stalks of corn, some two feet high, standing around the room. Upon investigating the strange phenomenon he found that the roots of the corn had sprouted and grown through the carpet.

According to Mr. Mutsey the carpet has been on the floor for over ten years and has never been taken up and cleaned. He expresses the opinion that mice gnawed the kernels of corn from the cobs and scattered them around the room. The roof of his house leaks, he says, and he believes water has dropped on the carpet during rain storms. He expresses the opinion that the furnace pipe running through the room kept it hot and the moisture in the carpet started the corn sprouting with the above result.